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**THE LEFT HERESY IN  
LITERATURE AND LIFE**





# THE LEFT HERESY IN LITERATURE AND LIFE

BY

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AND OTHERS



METHUEN PUBLISHERS LONDON  
ESSEX STREET                      STRAND W.C.2

*First published in 1939*

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN**

## FOREWORD

THE AUTHORSHIP of this book as contained in the title needs explanation. The first four Sections were written in close consultation with Laura Riding; and many passages in the book are directly by her.

The last two Sections are reprinted from *Epilogue*, volume iii., published in 1937. They occurred there under the title *Politics and Poetry*—a collaborative study by Laura Riding, Robert Graves, Alan Hodge and myself; they have been included in revised form here, as providing a general critical background of values to the more discursive earlier sections.

H. K.



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*SECTION ONE*

**ANALYSIS OF THE LEFT EMOTIONAL  
BACKGROUND**





## *The Appeal of Argument*

THE METHOD most natural to politics is that of argument. To argue is to present one's ideas as beliefs incompatible with the ideas of other people ; the arguer does not want to find a basis of agreement. Argument creates the opposition 'what I believe' against 'what you believe'. Political statements all have a battle flavour—attack, counter-attack, defence. Left political statements generally have a counter-attack flavour, though the Conservative flavour is not attack but defence. A large part of Left rhetoric is spent in imposing the 'attack' flavour on the Conservative position (for example, in such phrases as: 'inspired Capitalist opinion', 'predatory imperialist interests', 'the ruling financial oligarchy'). Laura Riding has noted in a story about *Socialist Pleasures* that a great Socialist pleasure is winning arguments—'Socialists always win arguments'.<sup>1</sup> Thus Left truth is what Left-minded people believe *as against* what others believe. It represents a change of opinion from 'wrong' to right, and needs the 'wrong' opinion for a starting-point. And thus the term 'dialectic' (a term for 'development by contradiction' which Marx adopted from Hegel) is peculiarly apt for the Left attitude in argument.

With all Left method, one finds oneself seeking the 'psychological' background of the arguer, rather than considering whether the statements are true or not.

<sup>1</sup> From *A Progress of Stories*. Constable and Seizin Press, 1935.

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Left-minded people are so conscious of this that they supply ready-made psychological material: 'class psychology', which is not useful, however, since Left writers, Left thinkers, do not evince typical working-class psychology. We must assume that there is something temperamentally wrong with the temperamentally Left person—not merely that he has suffered wrongs as a member of a wronged class. Leftness is the cause of the wrong 'uns—those who regard themselves as 'victims of circumstances' in the sense of being victims of themselves. Thus, Lord Byron was a Left sentimentalist; *Don Juan* is typical of Left self-hatred.

The argument habit governs not only the Left attitude to others but the Left attitude to Lefts. The Communist Party gives official status to this 'comradely criticism'. The Left position itself is composed of cells of argument, there is no point of rest within it. For example, Stephen Spender's complaint that the Communists abuse him for being a 'bourgeois intellectual': the abuse and the complaint are merely part of the course of Communist argument. The delicacies which Stephen Spender introduces into the Communist argument naturally create more argument between the official view and his own.

Stephen Spender puts himself in an equivocal position, for nothing is clearer than that he would prefer to be at peace with the Communists, to be free of the necessity of arguing with them. He does not deny that he is a 'bourgeois intellectual'; he objects to the label as an explanation of what is 'wrong' with him, because it deprives him of the easy Communist sense of rightness. It is characteristic of Left thought that the standard rightness it achieves against standard class wrongs should not be elastic enough to embrace all the 'victims' who make use of it, that it should be unable to soothe every

variation of the sense of being wronged. Arguers must be ever on their guard against the finding of flaws in their argument. Communists particularly (because they test all ideas for their value as political argument), while welcoming recruits, must suspect every recruit as a potential revealer of flaws. And so the problem of reconciling variant arguments is a constant source of drama within the general argument.

Stephen Spender and the Communists disagree on the point, how poetry can be of use to Communism. The Communists on their side make it clear that they want 'party ideology'; Stephen Spender, elaborating his personal attitude as a poet, tries to conciliate Communist antagonism to the non-political tendencies of poetry. He offers them a poetry inflected with political interests; the Communists, on the other hand, have set their heart on the complete submission of all interests to political interests. Neither side (taking Stephen Spender as spokesman for the literary side) envisages the possibility of attitudes to society or poetry free of political colouring. Their common assumption is that every one must stand somewhere politically—and especially the poets, who are under suspicion as unpractical people who shirk the responsibility of taking a stand.

The pose of being 'above' politics, in the sense of being above the ruder preoccupations, is one that has in the past been assumed by the aesthete in literature and art. It is an irritating, shabby attitude, generally meaning incompetence in life or work. Yet it is curiously like the Left attitude in being an answer to the wrong sort of question—Which political side am I on? The proper question is: What position, besides the negative one of being repelled by political argument, or the aesthetic pose of indifference—what positive position is there on those practical difficulties which form the subject-matter

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of politics? Lefts automatically lump those who disclaim political opinions with the Rights. They admit no position that is not a political one, no answers to any question but their own. The aesthetes really belong within the Left ideological frame of temperament: they would choose a side if an easy and attractive one could be made for them.

Is there, then, no alternative to the political position other than that of standing lazily and gracefully 'above' politics? Yes, one may take one's stand *beyond* politics. To be 'above' politics is to say: 'no prospect offered by the political market at this moment would pleasurably reward my investment, and an apparent disinterest now will increase my power in the market when I eventually decide to use it.' To be 'above' politics may merely indicate a refusal to argue, but sitting on the fence soon becomes uncomfortable: one comes down on one side or the other in the end—to argue.

Yet politics need not be argued about. They can be understood, as every human activity can be understood. For this we must go beyond the limitations imposed by argument, in order to view them from a point where something more than the political realities of life are visible. Where is this point? What can *beyond politics* mean?

Politics cover such subjects as: the apportioning of labour resources, the safe-guarding of working conditions, the care of the sick and aged, colonial administration, traffic regulation, the social aspects of crime, female suffrage; all the subjects of national administration, and, in a wider sense, questions of diplomacy such as that of commerce between nations, the international aspects of crime and war. As against these there are other problems, such as: the truth about time, death, creation, the meaning of crime, of sexual differentiation,

and so on. Political problems relate to physical wrongs—how to set right this or that wrong suffered from *other human beings*: their solutions are not truths at all, but laws of self-protection, of social convenience—so-called concrete truths. The second kind of problem is beyond politics. Such problems are usually looked upon as ‘abstract’, as problems of philosophy. But they are, rather, problems of truth (philosophy introduces the political wrong-right accent into truth)—and, as such, are of the utmost practical importance; they bring us to consider what self, consciousness, life are, what reality the conglomerate world represents, and our daily balance of mind depends upon the way we consider them. The problems of adjustment to our physical and social surroundings are of lesser consequence in the complete problem of adjustment, though they are the ones that first thrust themselves upon us. Political problems derive from the more important problems of being; to make the greater wait upon the lesser is to reverse the order of their importance.

The intelligent person knows this, knows that politics cover the less important problems, and looks forward to the end of politics as an interest competing with serious experience. His stand is properly ‘beyond politics’. Yet, in ‘fairness’ and forbearance, he lingers in the political atmosphere, listens to all the arguments, in the hope that perhaps the political stand will produce its own beyond-politics position. Not only does this not happen, but the political arguments do not even produce their given end of political clarity. So we find that the people who take the political stand for the benefit of their intelligence on lesser and greater problems—and the conventionally ‘intelligent’ political stand to-day is the Left stand—acquire thereby neither a balanced condition of mind, nor a firm posture in their physical

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environment. Whether the political stand is operatively good, whether it is useful for resolving physical difficulties, can only be demonstrated in a comparison of governmental systems, in answer to the question : under which system are there fewer wrongs inflicted ? This would involve a statistical investigation requiring a large-scale taking of evidence, and would probably give no more specific result than that human beings, under whatever system, inflict wrongs on one another—and the more so as happiness is made a physical commodity which human beings supposedly receive at the hands of other human beings, rather than a more profound, internal kind of adjustment. What we are here, in this book, interested in discovering is whether the political stand is good for the mind, for the intelligence, for knowledge.

The first step, therefore, was to approach by letter people of reputed intelligence who have publicly taken the political Left stand, or writers who have evinced political interests. Replies received from a number of such persons will be dealt with later. For the moment it is pertinent to itemize the inquiries to which answers were wished, since, by stating the problems of the political stand from the point of view of the poet, the question 'whether the political stand is good for the mind' is brought into peculiarly sharp relief. It is an important problem for every one, but one of special poignancy for the poet, who is severely blamed if he seems to ignore the urgent physical problems, yet who is supposed to purvey attractive solutions to all the non-physical ones—and to enjoy being treated as 'imaginative', unofficial, 'unpractical', and so on.

1. What are the implications of being a poet ?
2. Are they different or the same under Capitalism and Socialism ?

3. What are the responsibilities of poet-being ?
4. Has the poet responsibilities to the state, to a political party, to the workers ?
5. What is the relation of poet-labour to labour in general ?
6. Why do contemporary writers feel it necessary to be political ?
7. How did they come to believe it necessary ?

Far more elaborate faculties are demanded of poets than are demanded of politicians, priests, bankers and film comedians. A poet is supposed to supply an orderly, perfect view of truth—every detail exact. He is supposed really to know, understand—for always—the permanent, true aspect of things. The poet takes this seriously, literally ; society in general takes it sentimentally. Then come the problems of the moment, the physical interests, about which there are opinions, disagreement as to what is true, what is not true—arguments. As the vanity of having everything physically ‘just-so’ increases, the assumption that truth can be defined and expressed in terms of physical arrangements becomes more and more articulate, more and more aggressive. Political values are substituted for truth, truths of the moment for permanences. Then comes the irritation : why are not all the literary people taking part in the argument, why are they being so superior ? Then follows the reaction : the literary people rush to prove that they care—they too can argue. And finally the question : what does all this do to the intelligence, if not make it inferior ?



## *The Psychological Appeal*

IN HIS PREFACE to a recent Left Book Club publication <sup>1</sup> Mr. John Strachey deplores the fact that, whereas 'free-lance critics of Marxism' have often demanded a comparative study of the doctrines of Marx and Freud, they have been too lazy or too ignorant to undertake the job. With the encouragement of Mr. Osborn's arguments before us, we can attempt to supply the comparative study Mr. Strachey is in need of.

Mr. Strachey points out that orthodox Marxists have tended to disparage the psychological theories of Freud—'It may be doubted, however, if the founders of Marxism would have adopted this attitude. Friedrich Engels in particular made it his business to pass in review every major scientific development which occurred during his lifetime.' A Marxist is a scientist. 'He must not be content when he has mastered the whole extensive folk-lore of effective political activity.' He must make it his business to pass in review the whole extensive folk-lore of ineffective sexual activity—till now ignored by Marxists—if there is any political kudos to be got by doing so. 'Psycho-analytic theory is still so incomplete that it is as yet dangerous to make particular deductions for practice from it. (The psycho-analysts, thereby showing themselves to be genuine and serious scientists, are the first to issue such a warning.)' Yet, 'acquaintance with psycho-analytic teaching can help us to exhibit a certain temper of the mind, a certain attitude to our

<sup>1</sup> *Freud and Marx*, by R. Osborn. Gollancz, 1937.

fellow-men, without which a political cause, however just and however true it may be, can hardly make its way.' Let us turn, then, to Mr. Osborn's arguments, which Mr. Strachey so much applauds, to learn just how valuable this temper of mind is.

'Now the field of study of the psychologist comprises the loves and hates, the credulities, prejudices, and loyalties of mankind.' Psychology, in fact, provides us with a certain range of meanings in these subjects. In addition, psychology claims an experimental corroboration for these meanings, which Mr. Osborn lists under the following six heads: the cure of nervous abnormality; the recovery of childhood or forgotten memories; hypnotic control of behaviour; explanations for slips of the tongue and pen; explanations for lapses of memory—the name on the tip of the tongue; and, lastly, the interpretation of dreams. Although Mr. Osborn ranks psychological explanations as evidence of the 'truth' of psychological theory, it is obvious that they cannot legitimately be said to corroborate psychological theory, since, as explanations, they are themselves the product of psychological technique. Psychological meaning does not corroborate itself—it is corroborated by its given end, the successful cure of nervous or mental disability. However, Mr. Osborn's allegiance to psychological meanings is apparently strengthened by logical flourishes of this kind. It also involves a belief that:

The most important events of our life—the emotional experiences of childhood—have passed beyond conscious reach, yet only by making them conscious can we understand the causes of much rational anxiety, the frustrations we experience in conscious purpose, our hesitations and unaccountable aversions; and only thus can we make the adjustments which enable us to live on a more rational plane (p. 43).

The trick by which we can supposedly acquire conscious memory of these childhood experiences is psycho-analysis. But then the following objection arises : psychological theory is based upon observations of abnormal or pathological cases—why should it be true for ‘normal’ people? Answer : ‘The fact is that the abnormal is removed from the normal by degrees only, and the tendencies in one are but an exaggerated form of the tendencies in the other. The exaggerated quality of mental tendencies which the pathological cases present merely makes it easier to study them.’

To recapitulate : political theory simplifies one set of problems. But to be satisfactory it must be supported by other simplifying theories. It needs first of all a theory of the emotions, to simplify the emotional problems ; and this psychology provides. That psychology is adequately simple is proved by its basing the emotional problems on childhood. ‘The most important events of life’ are placed in childhood ; childhood experience is made to supply the criteria for ideal adult behaviour. Abnormality, for the psychologist, is really the exaggeration of being adult : exaggeration of the normal, that is, childish, characteristics. Emotional irregularities are traced to adult interference in childhood, and later to the imposition of false adult meanings on childish meanings.

Very well then, we are all more or less psychologically abnormal—in fact, grown up. That unaccountable twitch of the facial muscles, that mysterious twirk of the left ear with which you punctuate your conversation—these are the symptoms of maturity. Do you never mis-spell a word, or make a *faux pas* in company? What—you notice these vagaries in others, but you do not attach any importance to them in yourself? Ah, that is most important : the child in you recognizes

the adult in others, but the adult in you makes you regard your own vagaries as normal. To recognize this you must be psycho-analysed. We are really all as mad as hatters, each in his own way.<sup>1</sup> Freud only supplies hints at a practical pattern of psychological normality, but (don't you see) the psychologically normal person—the true child—is the social revolutionist.

This is not all. Freudian psychology has invented a number of curious terms which may be of service to Marxism. These are (attention, please, or the rest of this section will be unintelligible): the *ID* which is the sum of man's irrational physical impulses; the *EGO* which is the rational compromise that man's conscious mind makes with the *id* on the one hand and external reality on the other—the unsatisfied *id*-demands being released in dreams from the *ego*'s censorship; and last, but not least, the *SUPER-EGO*, which is the reflexion within the *ego* of whatever external authority (parents mostly, Freud says) forbids the satisfaction of the *id*-demands (sexual demands mostly, Freud says). But let us, as Mr. Osborn does, quote Freud himself to show you how the thing works: 'The proverb tells us that you cannot serve two masters at once. The poor ego [poor adult] has a still harder time of it; it has to serve three harsh masters, and has to do its best to reconcile the claims and demands of all three. . . . The three tyrants are the external world, the *super-ego* and the *id*. . . .'<sup>2</sup>

Now the Marxist says: I don't mind agreeing with all this if you will allow me to interpret the *super-ego* in a

<sup>1</sup> 'Another form of escape is provided by compulsion neuroses. . . . Familiar compulsive acts are the frequent washing of hands, as if to remove a guilty stain, avoiding the cracks where the paving-stones meet, etc.' (p. 67). Yes, and the neurosis of avoiding avoiding the cracks where the paving-stones meet.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 103. Hogarth Press.

political sense. The *super-ego* is, obviously, the reflexion within the *ego* of reactionary capitalist state-authority, symbolized as the "father". If the King, or (in a Republic) the President, "father-symbol" flirts at times with the Virgin Liberty, it is only the mildest of flirting; he does not mean to father her kind of *id*. Lest this seems to be unfairly putting rubbish into the mouth of the Left, here is a quotation from Mr. Osborn to show that it is not: 'The *super-ego*'s influence was seen during the Jubilee celebrations, when many people, who ordinarily manifest little interest in the doings of Royalty, were emotionally aroused, and proclaimed by flags and revelry their "love" for the king-father' (p. 182).

The psycho-analyst and the Marxist approach the same phenomena from different angles. The one lays stress on subjective factors, the other on the external situation, and in unity enrich each other' (p. 201). In other words, Marxists have only to stand Freud on his feet (as Marx stood Hegel on his feet), and the theories fit—the 'father' symbol is the king and not, as Freud has it, the 'king' symbol the father. Thus, when our *id* (the child in us) gets loose at night on wild adventures with daggers, pencils, Zeppelins, caves, hammers, pairs of steps, runaway horses, stove-pipes, sickles, pockets and coffers, we are not really dreaming about family matters, but about international turning-points, problems of the United Front, revolutionary mass-movement. For the *id* is a thorough-going Socialist, persecuted in waking life by super-imposed capitalist reticences and economic realities—which he abandons in dream life with true child-like defiance of adult restraint. As Mr. Osborn says:

The old social relationships continue to dominate long after their necessity has passed, because the irrational compulsions of the *super-ego* hold men in subjection to existing

authoritative forces. . . . The *id* has been compelled to give up its gratifications for the sake of maintaining social cohesion. But now the existing form of social cohesion, the class relationships, the whole economic and social structure, no longer corresponds with the necessities of the productive process. The *id*, in consequence, becomes increasingly restless under restrictions which no longer have objective justification, and the *ego* finds it difficult to maintain its repressions in the face of changed economic necessity. The *super-ego* acquired its authority because the demands it made of the *ego* to repress *id* impulses largely coincided with the needs of external, economic reality. . . . But, with the passing of the economic conditions which gave it justification, its continued demands force the *ego* to oppose it. Or, as Marxists would say, the authority of the ruling class has only justification while it is a necessary condition for the use and development of the productive forces (pp. 190-191).

It should be clear from this how much sympathy there is between Freudian and Marxist theory. Their common aim is the emancipation of the caucus of physical impulses which constitutes the *id*, the reconstruction of the childish emotion-pattern. The *id* is the child in us, the *super-ego* is the false child (the bad boy) in us ; a conflict arises between crudity and vulgarity—with the poor *ego* sandwiched in the middle. No sooner has the *ego* made peace with the false child than the *id* makes a nuisance of itself. Or, as Marxists would say, no sooner is order imposed, with the *super-ego* controlling all the railway companies and the *id* driving all the engines, than the *id* wants to be director of railways as well as engine-driver—he can't, so he becomes a Marxist. Exit the *ego*.

In a chapter at the end of his book Mr. Osborn gives some applications of his hybrid theories. When viewed in the light of these, the failures of the German Communists and of the British Communists to gain a wide hold over the masses is simply explained. The remedies

turn upon the problem of leadership—' Our study of the *super-ego* tells us that the leader is the substitute for the infantile father, and is invested with the infantile conceptions of the father's omnipotence' (p. 262). The politicians want us 'children' to let them play the 'old man' parts. 'Whoever aims at leadership is striving to attach the emotional attitudes of infantile life to the father. And any party aiming at the leadership of the working class must understand the psychological factors involved in leadership, for in its difficult role of leading humanity to a new era in history it cannot afford to overlook any shred of scientific discovery' (p. 264).

The need for leadership, Mr. Osborn says, is universal (p. 265); it is merely a question of whom you want to lead you, and how. All that your *id* needs is a good Marxist, the *super-ego* who is the Child Transcendental. 'If Hitler and Mussolini, by deliberate publicity and propaganda methods, can be presented as saviours of the people, so too can Communist leaders. The difference, of course, is that the reputation of Communist leaders will not be built upon deceitful promises and demagogic flourishes, but upon a genuine determination to lead the workers in revolutionary struggle' (p. 270). It is criminal, said Lenin, to forego the methods of the enemy in the political struggle; particularly, Mr. Osborn adds, the mastery and use of 'the psychological technique by which millions of people may be bound in allegiance to a leadership' (p. 271). Lenin once described the reluctance to assuming paternity in the parliamentary struggle as 'an infantile disorder', and Stalin's enormous popularity was steadily nourished in the hearts of the Russian people by reference to him as the 'executor of Lenin's testament'.

'In this country, also, the Communist daily paper keeps its leader's face constantly before its readers, sends

signed photographs to admirers, greeting-cards, etc., which undoubtedly are necessary means of gaining prestige for him in working-class circles' (p. 270). Whether or not Communists make themselves more popular by the use of accredited psychological tricks—that is their funeral. But their weakness for Freudian idealism does make their ultimate aim clearer—the enfranchisement of those impulses which Freud comprises in the *id*. This is good from the Marxist point of view because it supplies the right kind of population—children. It purges emotional life of all the adult difficulties. It makes *naïveté* emotionally as well as intellectually respectable. It eliminates shame of incapacity to cope with difficult problems. It makes the immature or the muddled writer important because he is immature, or muddled. It sanctions emotional caprice, and excuses irresponsibility toward adult complexities: 'I don't even pretend to deal with them—I am a child.' It relieves the poet of all the dignity that formerly burdened his status: 'poet' becomes merely an antiquated courtesy-term, as the bourgeois addressee is given the title of 'Esquire' on a letter—and 'political' succeeds the gloomily respectable term 'literary'.

Mr. John Strachey, in his preface to Mr. Osborn's book, pretends that 'no one who cares for the development of Marxism as a living science will in future be able to neglect it' [Mr. Osborn's 'question of the relation of Marxism to psycho-analytic theory']. But no one does care for Marxism 'as a living science'. We who live don't; nor does the Marxist—who is interested not in life, but in the simplifications he can make of it. 'A living science' is a contradiction in terms; it is as to say 'living which is only science'—elementary living. Living is an adult process. Those who care for Marxism do so because it supplies a



technique for reducing the adult requirements for living to child requirements, by eliminating adult organization of experience, of the emotions. Marxism does not really need Freudian theory ; its tenets, and those of allied psychologies, are all implicit in the political tenets. Mr. Osborn's argument is that Marxist technique alone is not wide enough as a science of living for the average Marxist—which means, presumably, that he cannot be bothered to extract Marxian psychology from Marxian political theory. Nor can Mr. Strachey, who agrees with him.

But official Communism frowns on Mr. Osborn's recommendations. Writing on behalf of Communists in an official organ,<sup>1</sup> Prof. Bernal says that it is a sad comment on the backward state of Marxist knowledge in this country that such a book could be written at all, and even sadder that a well-known Marxist writer like Mr. John Strachey should praise it in a preface. 'In the decade after the war Freud's theories dominated the narrow circles of British intellectuals'—those intellectuals who then needed 'a creed of escape into an inner world of complexes and repressions and away from economic realities'. 'In recent years the Freudian wave has begun to recede'—escape can now be found in Marxism. Marxist psychological methods of dealing with emotional problems are more simple even than non-dialectical ones. Psychology trains you to become as a child ; but as a child of the old order, with a superabundance of living appetites—which would give Marxism the trouble of suppressing them. The Marxist child-citizen isn't born until there is Communism—when the only realities are economic ones, which organize your pattern of life for you. To seek a reconciliation between Freudian and Marxist theories is unnecessary ; it would

<sup>1</sup> *The Labour Monthly*, July 1937.

be a return to a 'stage of extremely immature and uninformed confusion'—that is, to Freudian childhood.

British Marxists are still uninformed. Prof. Bernal blames Mr. Osborn for not having read 'the voluminous amount of discussion . . . [of Freudian theory] . . . published in the Soviet Union and elsewhere'. But Mr. Osborn is 'probably less to blame than those Marxists who have never discussed the relations of Marx and Freud'. You have to discuss Freud for his contributions to science, which cannot be 'incorporated like Physics or Chemistry in the Marxist interpretation of the objective world', but are valuable, it would seem, as clinical methods for collecting the right data when you have it. You cannot accept his 'philosophy', because 'to accept the Freudian analysis is to accept by implication a completely non-dialectical view of psychology which must destroy the whole basis of Marxism'.

Prof. Bernal would not agree that Marxism is deficient in psychological interpretation. 'Marx does not start, as Freud does, with the idea of an essentially unalterable human psychology from which sociology can be derived. On the contrary he makes humanity for the first time comprehensible as the new quality which arises from social aggregation.' It appears that the trouble with Freud is that he produced his psychological theories too soon, before society had a chance of becoming Marxian. As a pre-Communist he could not base his theories on sound Communist data, and so they are only significant as a sort of sur-political experiment with time. Nevertheless, Freudian theory, in Prof. Bernal's estimation, is a dangerous competitor of Marxism, and one which is 'tending to Fascism'. 'The workers demand and have a right to demand a knowledge of psychology'—and 'all they get is Freudian psychology . . . because English Marxist writers have not applied themselves to

the subject or even translated what has been written elsewhere.' But the complaint is an academic one, since what matters at this pre-Communist stage is that Communism shall have a strong psychological appeal for intellectuals. Clearly, it has. Whether Marx or Freud affords the best explanation for this appeal is according to the convert—whether merely naive, or also perverse.

*Political Argument as Literary Criticism*(a) GORKI AND BUKHARIN <sup>1</sup>

GORKI ARGUED as follows in a speech at the first Soviet Writers' Congress held in Moscow in 1934 :

The most ancient verbal culture of man was that which accumulated as myth and symbolized man's practical aspirations to lighten his labour. The general type is the Tantalus myth—'There you have ancient man amid the phenomena of the outer world he has not yet learned to know.' Bourgeois culture created its heroes, but they are invariably as suspect as the aims of Capitalism in relation to the workers. What we, the proletarian writers, must do, he concludes, is to return somewhat to the method of ancient myth and create modern hero-leaders of labour.

Gorki's argument ought really to begin with the point that ancient man's 'practical aspirations' were also his spiritual ones. His economic system was also his myth ; not because he was a 'materialist', but because he took an extremely modest view of himself ; he expressed his aspirations in terms of physical discipline. This is the first stage, of tribal magic and taboo, which is generally interpreted as mystical, but, in the Communist view, as strictly materialistic. Later, as man grew more self-confident in his physical activities, he became spiritually more ambitious. He wanted to be more than he had been, he compared what he was with what he was not,

<sup>1</sup> Quotations in this section are taken from *Problems of Soviet Literature, Reports and Speeches*, Martin Lawrence.

he made gods, and out of these God, as a standard of comparison. Thus there began the separation between economic and spiritual realities—what man was and what man might be ; with economic aspirations and spiritual aspirations reacting upon each other mutually, stimulating each other, the growth of wealth coinciding with the growth of religion, material prosperity an apparently separate end from spiritual prosperity, yet the rhetoric of religion used to express material ambition, and the flavour of material ambition creeping more and more into religion.

So there is no need for the proletarian writer to 'return to the method of ancient myth' ; he can find—and does find—his verbal apparatus in modern religious terminology. The only difference between Communist and Christian language is that, the Communist separation between economic and spiritual ends being more violent than the Christian, Communist literary terms for economic idealism are more crudely sentimental than the terms of 'bourgeois' idealism. Gorki's evocation of ancient myth is an attempt to convey the impression that the sentimental literary language of Communism is 'primitive'. But it is really an already out-moded vulgar dialect, the language of nineteenth-century sentimental materialism—as the following piece of eloquence, in which Gorki attempts to fuse the proletarian with the poetic end, nicely illustrates :

Myth is invention . . . to extract from the sum of a given reality its cardinal idea and embody it in imagery ; and . . . if we add the desired, the possible, we obtain romanticism [which is] the basis of myth and is highly beneficial in that it tends to provoke a revolutionary attitude towards reality, an attitude that changes the world in a practical way.

Communists do not hate religion because it separates economic from spiritual aspirations—since they make

an even sharper separation than religion does, so sharp that it is impossible for them to define spiritual ease except as something that supplies a literary language for the description of economic ease: they hate religion because it assumes a point where physical ambitions end, where physical needs are satisfied, and spiritual ambitions and satisfactions begin. Communists hate the religious notion of a sufficient physical comfort, the Christians haste to move on to the spiritual triumphs; as Christians hate the interminable Communist dalliance on the physical plane. Communists are nevertheless willing to use, do use, the hasty language of Christian idealism, while strict, non-literary Communist language is too slow and tedious to serve benevolent Christian sociology. Communism, in fact, could not get along without borrowed emotions: it has no emotional—or indeed intellectual—life of its own. Religion has only the faults attendant upon haste. Communism has an initial vice—the vice of self-repetition, which is the chief characteristic of argument. We criticize religion not for its ends, but because its methods are foolish. But Communism we criticize for its ends, which are no ends, but rather a method of submerging ends in the self-repetitive, indeterminate routine of economics. Christianity is right in that there is a point of sufficient physical comfort—a point where the chair we sit in, or the food we eat, loses importance. There can be enough of comfort—and enough of economics. Physical ambitions are easy to fulfil; by making them difficult, interminable, Communism adds a viciousness to economic motives which Capitalism, in all its irresponsibility, cannot match. Religion makes spiritual ambitions too easy to fulfil, but thus creates a rhetoric of optimism which, though bad as literature, is good as sentiment—as Communist readiness to avail itself of such rhetoric shows.

Gorki's advice to the writers assembled was :

As the principal hero of our books we should choose Labour, that is a person, organized by the processes of labour, who in our country is armed with the full might of modern technique, a person who, in his turn, so organizes labour that it becomes easier and more productive, raising it to the level of an art.

Communists might perhaps excuse this as an index of the then relative backwardness of the productive forces in the U.S.S.R. (literature being to them ideology, and ideology a reflexion of economic development), but a view of literature as a technique of comment on labour problems hardly provides for the existence of more than newspapers, trade-union magazines and industrial handbooks.

Labour certainly demands our attention as a subject, though the facts do not corroborate Gorki's plea for a romantic view of labour. In his *Capital*, Karl Marx describes the development of primitive handicraft into manufacture and thence into machinofacture. This development involved the systematic differentiation in a single workshop of trades hitherto organized as independent handicrafts—the first stage ; and then, by the introduction of machine-power into manufacture, the gradual elimination of those requirements of labour which formerly distinguished one kind of worker personally and qualitatively from another. The historical satisfaction of those yearnings which Gorki believes the ancient myths to have symbolized, has, indeed, separated labour (purposive manipulation) from its emotional content (creative skill) ; to-day's industry (and Marxian economics) is based upon a quantity of physical effort, labour-power, which is emotionally undifferentiated from one field of production to another.

The logical deduction of Marxian economics should

therefore be that labour under modern conditions *cannot* be sustained as an art. Gorki might reasonably have proposed the notion 'pure labour' or 'labour for labour's sake'; but the use of religious phraseology, by some one from whom we expect at least the integrity of 'toughness', brings a shock. One might say that Tantalus to-day was represented by the clown-writer whose sacrificial task it was to demonstrate that literary ambition, when identified with physical ambition, led only to perpetual frustration in political jargon. It is to be feared that Gorki had nothing so salutary in mind, that he was offering, after all, serious 'literary' counsel.

Life, as asserted by social realism, is deeds, creativeness, the aim of which is the uninterrupted development of the priceless individual faculties of man, with a view to his victory over the forces of nature, for the sake of his health and longevity, for the supreme joy of living on an earth which, in conformity with the steady growth of his requirements, he wishes to mould throughout into a beautiful dwelling-place for mankind, united in a single family.

Literature has other aims than the breeding of a continuous exuberance of physical energy, however productive this might be of physical comfort and conveniences; other aims than 'the development of the priceless individual faculties of man', which may be left, in no sense of disrespect, to the artists—painters, sculptors, musicians—and, in general, to the life-worshippers; literature has other concepts of truth than those contained in the cliché 'life'—whether it be a Socialist or a health-cult cliché.

The second authoritative Party voice heard at the Moscow Congress was that of Nikolai Bukharin. In his view Russia, which now occupied a position of world-wide importance, was on the brink of 'mighty' battles, thanks to the tremendous successes achieved in technical



and economic spheres and on the battle-fields of the class-war under the wise guidance of Comrade Stalin. The immediate programme included 'a peculiar complication of those problems which we have to tackle on our literary front in general and on our poetic front in particular . . . problems which demand higher quality in all spheres, and a more subtle approach to all kinds of literary production, poetry included'. Bukharin set the Russian writers the task of 'catching up and outstripping Europe and America in craftsmanship'.

What the visiting European delegates thought of this grandiose transcription to the 'literary front' of Russian contemporary economic aspirations has not been recorded; their reactions depended, undoubtedly, on the quality of their own writing and their native literary resources. The impression received on reading Bukharin's speech is that he did not feel himself quite 'the politician', nor quite comfortable among the political. He felt rather 'the Party intellectual', with a debt to his own self-esteem as such; and thus his contribution to the problems which he set the politicians on the literary front began with an apology for 'boring' them with the intricacies, the 'subtle approach', as he put it, which his intellectual status demanded—'but boredom, like evil, will the better set off the good that will follow in the latter part of my report'. As Bukharin had learned, unnecessary 'intellection', however conscientious, is severely frowned on by Russian political intelligence. (And, as he was to learn, punished.)

The points of which Bukharin continued to try to convince his audience were that poetry is 'a definite form of social activity, governed by the laws of social development', and that its function as such is 'to assimilate and transmit experience and educate character, to reproduce definite group psychologies.' But he had to

admit that no amount of social and technical encouragement produced a poet: *poetae nascuntur*. As a rather poor second-best he advised the study of 'poetics', which he defined as the 'elucidation of the laws governing the so-called formal elements'; that is, 'problems of rhythm and metre, problems of verbal scoring, of stanza construction, etc.'—to put the matter plainly, 'the theory of literature . . . as it acquires the significance of a system of rules'. What the Russian poet as customer is to make of this official offer of fifty-shilling tailoring will be seen when he appears. We can only hope, meanwhile, that he will prefer a homelier cut.

Bukharin did full justice to himself and to the quality of his criticism in a commentary on a handful of recent Russian poets—and, one is inclined to believe, full justice to the 'poets' themselves.

In Alexander Blok we, of course, have a poet of tremendous power . . . whose verse achieves a chiselled monumentality, rising as it does to the scintillating heights of *Retribution*. . . . His *Scythians* is written with an acme of expressive power and embraces a tremendous sphere of ideas and images. . . . Blok is for the revolution . . . he has earned his right to stand on our side of the barricades in history.

More of the soil, considerably less cultured, with the nature of a peasant-kulak, Sergey Yessenin, a full-throated singer and minstrel, a talented lyrical poet, strode across the fields of the revolution. . . . The song structure of his poetical speech, his harking back to the folk-song rhythms of the countryside, to the patchwork quilt of village imagery, the profoundly lyrical and boisterous dare-devil *timbre* of his poetic voice were combined in him with the most backward shreds of ideas—enmity to the city, mysticism, the cult of provincial bigotry, and the knout. . . . In his heart of hearts as a poet, he was filled with the poison of despair when confronted with the new phases of the revolution.

[Yessenin committed suicide in the U.S.S.R. in 1925.]

Nearest to the proletarian revolution came Valery Bryusov, the ideologist of the upper circles of the radical industrial bourgeoisie, crowned with all the laurels and chrysanthemums of fame in the Maecenas salons of the cultured bourgeois aristocracy. . . . How are we to explain the historical paradox that precisely this commanding figure of bourgeois literature should have come over to us and died a member of the Communist Party?

Demyan Bedny is a genuine proletarian poet. The fundamental principle of his poetic work is its mass appeal, its profoundly popular character, its influence on the millions. In this respect the position he holds in Soviet literature is quite unique. His imagery does not suffer from ornateness; it is simple and at the same time keen, readily understandable, taken from the thick of life, breathing its flavour.

Another great figure of our poetry is Vladimir Mayakovsky. This turbulent, thorny and tremendous talent, with his thunder-like voice, broke through to the proletariat from the Bohemia of the semi-bourgeois literary world, and through futuristic revolt against all rules and canons, against the dry commandments of the past, crashed his way with mighty fists into the camp of proletarian poetry, achieving one of the first places in it. . . . Mayakovsky stood out as the mighty voice of the street. . . . Angular and ungainly, this roaring poetic lion of the revolution began, to the crackle of machine guns in the Civil War, to pour out the lines of his stanzas, which themselves sounded like volleys of machine-gun fire. . . . The poetry of Mayakovsky is poetry in action. It is a hailstorm of sharp arrows shot against the enemy. It is devastating, fire-belching lava. It is a trumpet-call that summons to battle.

[Mayakovsky committed suicide in U.S.S.R. in 1930, having severely deprecated Yessenin's suicide five years before.]

A whole galaxy of Komsomol <sup>1</sup> poets has grown up, all of them strongly influenced by Mayakovsky. . . .

Bezymensky was undoubtedly the poetic mouth-piece of the new generation of Komsomol . . . but he . . . began to

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the Russian 'Young Communist League'.

get 'antiquated', and was directly faced with the danger of simply repeating the slogan of the day in rhyme and thus losing the poetic zest of his work.

Fresher and more profound proved Eduard Bagritsky, who died such an untimely death. Ideologically, he went considerably astray at times. . . .<sup>1</sup>

It is extraordinary that a person who used words with the extreme irresponsibility that Bukharin did in this part of his Congress speech should pose as one who recognizes 'the fact that words play a tremendous part in poetic creation'. It is extraordinary because, if the comments just quoted show anything, they show that Bukharin cared nothing for words and recognized no responsibility in their use. It is usual to excuse political platform-speakers their flamboyant excesses, but why should we—unless we care for nothing except politics? This is the real issue: what do we care about? If we care about words, which is in the large sense to care about truth, we cannot care much about politics, which make words subservient to argumentative bias. A care for words is compatible with an appropriate attention to physical order, but an exclusive concentration on physical order must cripple our instinct of language, of truth; an insistence that such or such a system of physical order is of basic spiritual importance destroys the proportions of meaning. The more we care about politics, the less we care about words—the more opinionated we are, the less truth we speak. The language

<sup>1</sup> Early in 1937 Bukharin was removed from the editorship of the Party organ, *Izvestia*, later tried as a Trotskyist and executed. 'How was it that the traitor Bukharin was so long successful as a writer and editor?' I enquired at a Communist bookshop, offering them some volumes of second-hand Bukharin at 3d. apiece (refused). They replied: 'Oh, we had to preserve a Front, just as we had to tolerate Caballero in Spain.' [H. K.]

of politics is the language of opinion, and has no other coherence than that of self-repetition. Conservative and Liberal opinion when strongly rendered has the confessed obstinacy or tentativeness of opinion. But Left opinion invariably parades itself as logic—which is one reason why Left writers are inferior, as writers, to writers of different political opinion, and why they are more brutal and dishonest in their use of language.

Bukharin said that although words play their 'tremendous part in poetic creation', this 'does not in any way run counter to a sociological treatment of poetry, because even the word itself is the product of social development and represents a definite condensing point in which a whole series of social factors find their expression.' The standard of language here, in fact, is political eloquence: to be interested in words as they can be made to serve political purposes. ('Social' to a politician means 'political', and so does 'poetic'.) But political speeches, novels, poems, must be judged by literary not political standards; they cannot be estimated in terms of political achievements—political achievements must face severe tests of their own, of public convenience and practicability. Political literature, then, asks for special dispensations from literary tests—which we are ready to grant if its writers will admit that it is only what they write to prove that they belong to the right party. When other pretensions are made for it, however, the literary critic is obliged to point out not only the literary corruptions, but the political fallacies responsible for them.

#### (b) STEPHEN SPENDER

Stephen Spender, of the literary revolutionaries in England, has accepted perhaps most sincerely, because most naively, the burden of a political conscience. In

1935 he published *The Destructive Element*, in which he makes an elaborate rationalization of this acceptance. His initial point here is that one must find 'belief,' a sturdy attitude towards contemporary events—renouncing philosophic disinterest, as represented by William James, ecclesiastical aloofness, as represented by T. S. Eliot, and that sententious espousal of the affairs of the political world as the 'true moral subject' which D. H. Lawrence and, in another way, W. B. Yeats, seem to typify. He sees two alternatives, which are, however, only one alternative 'in spite of the attempts of various imperialist poets to carry on a buccaneering tradition'.

It is almost impossible, he says, for the artist (he means the writer) to contemplate politics to-day without some backing, because politics are so chaotic, and an undirected assumption of political responsibility would lead the writer to the mad-house. 'If we want beliefs, or even a view of history, we must either turn back to the past, or we must exercise our imagination to some degree, so that we live in the future.' That is, we must, somehow or other, find a new myth to tide us over the worries of our complex physical life of to-day: about the most concrete contemporary subjects, apparently, we cannot think, only have beliefs. And where is the myth to be found? Where, but in the bright red future of Communism! Yet there are still difficulties. In fact, it is at this point that the real difficulties begin. On the one hand, there is a public to be considered, whose interest in Communism is vague, if not hostile; and on the other hand, there are the Communists themselves, who greet vague allegiance with the sharpest resentment. Spender cites the infamous R.A.P.P.<sup>1</sup> which was respon-

<sup>1</sup> Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, formed in 1928, dissolved in 1933 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

sible in its time for so much autocratic Party bullying of writers ; the suicides of Yessenin and Mayakovsky ; and Pilnyak as an example of the humiliating subservience to Party self-importance expected of the writer in Soviet Russia as the condition of Party support. Yet, ' whatever may be the faults of Russian writers to-day, they do at least reach a wide audience, and they do succeed in writing about matters which passionately concern the people '.

But even if the English Communists were able to offer large sales as compensation for official bullying, there is the question : could it be done if it were thus made worth doing ? Could the problem of writing poems that are good poetry and good politics be solved—assuming for the sake of *argument* that such poems could one day be popular with English readers ? Spender rebukes Day Lewis for making unnecessary concessions to Communism in a poem : ' Yes, why do we all, Seeing a Communist, feel small ? ' Nor is he quite sure that poems can attempt the ordinary political attack.

' The innocent wing is soon shot down, and private stars fade in the blood-red dawn.' The poet is evidently on the side of ' the red advance of life ', because he believes that ' only ghosts can live between two fires '. The poem is not only about Communism ; it also has a propagandist element : it argues, and some of the argument is, to say the least, controversial.

The concession, Spender feels, may be premature, since ' the claims of the poem to value ' (from the Communist point of view) consist in its assertion ' that the struggle between two worlds is *real*—as real as the descriptions of environment in novels '. The poet must go slowly. Not only must he get used to Communist ways : he must be careful to accustom the Communists

to his. His poems must read as naturally to them as novels. (Of course, he can't expect the Party to regard them as more real than novels.)

The immediate, as opposed to the future, advantage to the writer of all this give-and-take, it is urged, is the increased confidence induced by the thought of Party support: 'The writer who grasps anything of Marxist theory feels that he is moving in a world of reality, and in a purposive world.' And if any one is tempted to wonder why a poet should be burningly preoccupied by such problems as a more equitable distribution of wealth, or the elimination of calamities produced by competitive trade, 'it is as well to remember that perhaps the most fundamental of all beliefs illustrated by drama and poetry, in all history, is the idea of justice'. The political conscience here soothes the literary conscience with a literary precedent. And the uncertain literary conscience accepts the consolation—though the idea of *political* justice was never 'in all history' a traditional theme in drama or poetry. But such ambiguities of argument strengthen the political if not the literary conscience.

Since when, it may be asked, has it been the business of the poet to offer himself as contractor for all the political odd jobs which politicians have not the capacity to execute themselves? If the poet is suffering from a sense of doing-nothing, let him examine whether *as a poet* he is really doing nothing, or merely doing nothing in political contexts. If he is really doing nothing as a poet, then the appropriate challenge to himself is: Am I a poet or should I be doing something else? At any rate, no amount of political activity can be entered on the balance-sheet of literary activity—except in the debit column.

It seems, then, that if literature is suffering from a neurosis, we cannot escape from it by ignoring it, and by observing



only the shell of the world, and attacking our own faults as we find them in our friends.

It seems, rather, that politics is suffering from a literary neurosis which envelops the uncertain writer, who would normally be a mild and even timid spirit but who, as a politician, becomes conspicuous for linguistic fierceness. It is easier to be political than to be critical. Communism offers the poet political terminology that lends itself to pseudo-critical adventures.

Once political opinions are used as a critical sense, there is no limit to critical daring. In an article on A. E. Housman, written for the *Daily Worker* (November 1936), Spender makes a pseudo-critical comparison between Housman and Baudelaire. If Baudelaire, he says, had been English, he would probably have been given a Fellowship and have withdrawn as Housman did, instead of living with a negress, getting syphilis and writing poetry. 'I cannot help feeling that if Housman, instead of being a Senior Common Room connoisseur of the best wine, had lived a more Baudelairean life, he would have been a greater, certainly a more prolific artist, and a more generous critic. The English upper classes do not only convert trade union leaders into privy councillors: they convert poets, bohemians and scholar-adventurers into dons.' What are we to think of the critical values of a 'poet' whose notion of a cure for English literary donnishness is a little French sexualism—a traditional connoisseurship in sex not very different in quality from donnish connoisseurship in wine? And what, equally, of politicians who find such literary propaganda politically pertinent? It is all valuable, one must suppose, because it stresses sex, and talk about sex places the discussion immediately on the psychological level, and Communists indulge psychology as the 'human' (i.e. politically intelligible) element of literature.

Thus, as the *Daily Worker's* 'leading young poet' says of Auden in the same paper: 'One can put this in another way by suggesting that he [Auden] seeks to reconcile the teachings of Marx and Freud.'

In *The Destructive Element* Spender refers the Communists to the clinical discoveries of the psychologists for an alternative explanation of the causes of war. Psychology is the university of subjects which literature and politics may have in common—the 'human' subjects: such as sex, war, environment, frustration. To be politically interesting a subject must contain a 'wrong' in it. The writer who wants to be successful in the political market must school himself in psychology, the educational storehouse of wrongness and wrongedness of all kinds. Sex is the most popular title among these; people like to feel that they are being justified in their own sexual idiosyncrasies, that all their sexual problems may be dismissed as the original wrong that humanity suffers from fate. Political interest in sex is limited, properly, to such problems as the enlargement of the political and economic public created by the enfranchisement of women. Psychology gives sex, as a political subject, more literary scope—more words, though not more meaning. Sex is, indeed, the most limited of subjects; it is on an elementary level of meaning. The more seriously one is speaking, the sooner is the sexual interpretation inadequate: one moves to other subjects, other levels of meaning. But the Communist litterateur, anxious to show that he takes a realistic view of life, that he is not just 'literary', finds in sex a subject in which he can demonstrate solidarity with common humanity—the more so as he can adduce sexual maladjustments of his own, that prove him as much victimized by circumstances as every one else. Of course, the more genuine a poet is, the less is he a

mere pawn of circumstances ; but to the Left reading public literary genuineness means talent in political jargon. A poet who tries to produce such jargon sincerely, as Spender does, for instance, is giving more than is asked—and is not taken very heartily to the Left bosom. For this reason Auden should be much more of a hero in Left circles than Spender. No one could possibly feel that Auden was making any sacrifice of his 'difference' : for as a poet he has no genuine originality of difference from common humanity, only a talent of literary jargon.

Stephen Spender's book, *Forward From Liberalism*,<sup>1</sup> is 'concerned with drawing the outlines of a personal attitude towards Communism,' and is frankly addressed to the Left public in the jargon they like. At a meeting shortly after its publication,<sup>2</sup> Spender as frankly blamed his audience for 'expecting' him to write this kind of book, although, in the same speech, he dwelt at length on his recent 'political mission' to Spain. The Left audience has as much right as we to ask : if Stephen Spender's heart is not wholly in politics, why should we sympathize with his difficulties in being political ? If there is activity available to him as a writer which he feels preferable to political activity, could we not have the benefit of that rather than appeals to our sympathy with his unhappiness in writing Left jargon ? After all, if we want Left jargon, there are the Communists themselves to supply it. Our conclusion must be : he is wasting his time as a writer by being political—and, since he knows it, we cannot sympathize with him.

Stephen Spender asked himself in his speech, 'How is

<sup>1</sup> Gollancz, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> February 3, 1937. Stephen Spender on *Writers in a Changing World*, under Left Book Club auspices.

it possible to be political and remain a writer?' and concluded that the writer's duty as a politician was to show 'how the political problem is at the root of passionate problems affecting people'—'the writer's realm is psychology, but he must draw political conclusions.' Yet this could be as well, if not better, described as the politician's duty as a writer. Must writers become the literary proxies of politicians because they do not know how to write convincingly enough? What are the circumstances that force writers to regard this service as a duty, in spite of their confessed distaste for it? Would it not be simpler to teach politicians how to write readable prose—granted that they have a right to express themselves? Or, if they are unteachable, at least not to sign one's name to the ghost-writing one does for them? There are hundreds of ghost-writers who avoid public shame by the simple device of hack anonymity.

### (c) C. DAY LEWIS

Mr. C. Day Lewis began a broadcast talk <sup>1</sup> in the *Youth Looks Ahead* series with an unwitting contradiction, which neatly illustrates the kind of sentimental error into which poets fall when they see themselves torn between two loves—love of society and love of poetry—and make politics the method of reconciliation between the two loves.

And let us at the start get it out of our heads that life and letters are two separate worlds. . . . It is true that he [the writer] is in part an individualist. But, also, from the very beginning, he has been the spokesman of his fellows. When a social group is decaying or inadequate or undergoing the pangs of some vital change, its spokesman is bound to feel

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<sup>1</sup> Published in 1935 with two other essays as No. 29 in the Hogarth Day to Day pamphlets.

an unhappiness and discontent which are additional to anything he may feel as an individual. At this point, where living together has become difficult and painful, the writer turns to the science of living together, to politics.

The problem which Day Lewis set his audience involves this contradiction : if the writer as an individual differs from all other individuals in that his unhappy social preoccupations are 'additional' to his individual ones, in what sense can he, *as a writer*, claim community with society ? Put more precisely, the question is : if the poet is thus different from his social fellows, what sort of community exists between him, as a poet, and them ? And if we interpret the notion of community to mean more than mere physical contiguity, it becomes relevant to ask also : what is the nature of community from the poet's point of view ? And what is the poet's instinctive attitude to society at large—the poetic rather than the social attitude ?

When the problem which Day Lewis presents as a contradiction in terms is stated in this way, it shows itself clearly to be this peculiar problem : how the poet's difficulties in getting social tolerance and respect as a poet become confused with society's difficulties in fixing laws of decent physical fellowship. Society at large must always be construed to be at a lower level of social decency than the poets, for whom decency involves scruples of truth as well as of social logic. When a poet attempts to make an identification of poetic with social morality, he is 'going primitive' ; and as a 'spokesman' of social morality he is inadequate—because society, although without a high morality of physical behaviour, is always behaving better to itself than either laws or physical instincts provide, is always surpassing its own primitiveness. For this incalculable emotional caprice of decency such social

enthusiasts as Day Lewis fail to allow—nor does Left ‘psychology’ allow for it: what may be called the incidence of poetic influence on social behaviour.

It is to be wondered what Day Lewis’s audience, comfortably and decently seated round loud-speakers, thought of the suggestion that it was ‘decaying or inadequate, or undergoing the pangs of some vital change’. His listeners had every excuse for wondering who exactly was this ill-mannered fellow who insisted on such intimate intrusion, such piously insulting self-debasement, in order to be one of them. Day Lewis admitted that he was intruding: ‘Literature will become more concerned with the relations between masses and less with the relations between individuals . . . more deliberately a partisan in life’s struggles. In fact, it will moralize more. I know that this idea will be repugnant to many of you; but it is a possibility that must be faced.’ Of course it will be repugnant to them—society is sensitive, and because at any particular moment it is superior to its physical instincts, its history. At any particular moment society dissolves into individual persons, and persons are poetic rather than political or social entities. Hence the sympathetic envy which the ‘ordinary’ person has of the poets—not to be assuaged by the poet’s benevolent conversion to ordinariness.

And what is the poet’s ‘society’—since his notion of community cannot be that of society at large? It is really the notion of community in truth as against community in temporality, which is subject to physical accidents and brutalities. There are two levels of community: social community, from which physical ease may be got; and poetic community, of which the good result is knowledge. The poet’s function is to explore this ‘additional’ level, to compare its permanence

with the temporary realities of social existence. When he attempts to make an equivalence between the two levels, he is creating only temporary literature, and for society at its worst. He thinks he is being a more conscientious social being ; but he is only lecturing society on its depravities, behaving like the Wellsian man-from-another-planet who sets out to put childish Earth in order. Poets have no right to be so proud—as social beings they are subject to the same weaknesses as their fellows.

There is another problem which Day Lewis introduces into the problem of poet-being, and upon which something may here be pertinently said : the problem of present social unhappiness—‘ living together has become more difficult and painful ’. Unhappiness is an obvious ingredient of much of the conversation that takes place between people, of the ‘ news ’ in our daily papers, and, more precisely, of people’s behaviour to one another. Further, Day Lewis’s solution of the problem is of interest because, although it amounts to a prescription for aggravating the situation, it does draw attention to the real nature of the problem itself.

Day Lewis’s advice is that people should turn from their difficulties and pains ‘ to the science of living together, to politics ’ ; and thus we must estimate, before endorsing his advice, the relation of politics to the difficulties and pains for which they are prescribed as a remedy. It is to be noted first that the difficulties and the pains have become encrusted with a language of popular description which indicates, though in a chaotic manner, their intrinsically personal and local character. To give a few illustrations of everyday sociological comment :

‘ Nice chap. Had a promising career at school and Oxford. Scholarships. And then failed the Civil Service Exam. Can’t believe he really put his back into

the work. Seems to have lost interest in everything, somehow, except Left-wing poetry. Ought to have more sense. Father and mother worried to death about him.'

Or: 'Can't understand her. Still a handsome woman. Plays a good game of bridge. Used to be great guns with the men down at the mess. Been losing interest in her appearance lately. She and her husband fight like cat and dog. What's the world coming to?'

Or: 'Queer fellow. Got one of the best collections of Chinese sword-hilts in Europe. Never been the same since he retired. Used to do a round in just under eighty. No money troubles. Healthy. Doesn't touch the whisky. Must have something on his mind—but what? Losing all his friends. Sad.'

Or: 'Can't make up her mind what she wants to do with herself. Been wasting her time lately with the Yellowhammers Credit Group. Before that it was the Progressive Stars and Chisels. Pretty girl. Musical. Dances well. Had a rough passage with that set she got mixed up with abroad. She ought to be making some fellow a decent wife by now'.

Such are the various descriptions people make of the unhappiness they see around them. They are, as a rule, certainly not statements of economic misfortune. Rather, they are statements of the kind that we have come to describe as 'psychological', in the sense that they are an index of mental not material unhappiness. Behind each unhappy 'case' of this kind is a feeling of a fundamental dissatisfaction with self—economic unhappiness is something much simpler, something self-defining, being instantly cancelled when money, or the job, is found. 'Psychological' unhappiness shifts the burden of definition, of understanding, on to others: people hesitate to say that this or that is wrong with them when the cause of their unhappiness is that they want to be



literary purposes—the bourgeois writer must share it. He must work and sleep with them'. A truly piteous fate. He must tell somebody about it. He cannot tell 'them', so he tells 'us'. He must have fellow-writers who are not Communists who will regard him, in his lacerated literary sensibilities, as a saint. Poor literary butterflies staining their wings with 'life'—or, is it, moths fluttering round the flame of life? All the literature of the past has, presumably, been written by people who never really lived, cruelly deficient in the red blood of literature. Therefore the working class has been the victim of injustices. Therefore literature is to be regarded 'as being ultimately—as all thought should be—a guide to living'. Then silence falls as the Communist Party sticks a pin into one more poor butterfly and adds it to its collection of bourgeois exhibits.

There is, in fact, very little in 'life' for the ex-writer Left writer. He moves among the workers, but they do not know Him. And he must be careful to convince his Capitalist publishers that he is not a Communist in the vulgar sense of the word, and that there is a polite Left public for his work. Unlike the professional agitator, who may find it possible to work anonymously, 'he must accept all the dangerous implications of lime-light'; and where 'soft persuasions' fail, there is 'victimization' in the background. If he does manage to combine Left-wing agitation with earning his daily bread, the Communists do not make it easy for him, with their jeers of 'vague revolutionism'. To crown everything, 'the hard fact is that the writer can still get a very adequate living out of the present economic system,' and so the Communist cannot logically expect the writer to be 'unalloyed revolutionary material'—to have an economic grudge of his own to strengthen his grudge against literature.

This is 'our talented, average, vaguely revolutionary young writer'. Day Lewis describes him for us :

The philosophy behind his work is a home-made make-shift thing.

He takes Freud seriously, and not as a message from heaven or a smoking-room story.

He is seldom gravely neurotic or a self-deceiver.

He is free from those sexual conflicts which tormented his orthodox Christian forbears for centuries.

He tends to be driven to homosexuality, as a refuge from responsibilities, on account of his early war-environment and a radical weakening of morale in the class from which he springs.

The result of this is that his work is marked by a certain evasion—a leading up to a dramatic climax or a moral judgement and then shying away from it.

So here it is, 'the moral make-up of the average serious young writer' ! And, believe it or not, 'it is his kind that has the widest influence over the serious reading public of to-day' !

In his third essay Day Lewis says that it is often asked, 'What should be the attitude of Communists to poetry ?' and, as a question upon which this depends, 'Is poetry of any value to the revolutionary ?' The complacency with which he states that not only some Communists have asked these questions, but also some 'poets', is a measure of his own tolerance, as a poet, of political interference in poetry. The correct reply to the first of these questions, from the point of view of the poet, is : Communists should have no attitude to poetry if they are Communists in the sense that they think politically all the time (which they do if they are 'good' Communists). It is like the question, What should be the attitude of street-cleaners to the laws ? If there

happen to be laws about street-cleaning, street-cleaners obviously should know them—but this would not be an ‘attitude.’ In so far as poetic values are applicable to politics, Communists should study poetry—but this is a matter of education, not attitude. The question would have to be revised: ‘Are Communists literate?’ As to the second question (‘Is poetry of any value to the revolutionary?’): poetry is of value to any one according as his ends are the same as the ends of poetry. Poetry would be of no value to a person who had an exclusive end of street-cleaning, or of revolution.

Our interest in the questions here, however, is that they provide an occasion for Day Lewis to define poetry, as one who is not averse as a poet from political interference:

Poetry discloses for us emotionally, as science does intellectually, the hidden links in nature. Also, while psychology helps us towards the understanding of our own motives, poetry enables us to feel them more keenly and get them in perspective.

Let us examine the meanings given these terms, which at first seem used in all critical innocence, to discover the degree of political corruption the passage represents. We know from external evidence that the passage is political journalism, not literary criticism—but Day Lewis would claim that it is both good criticism and good politics. ‘Nature’ we must here take to mean ourselves, ‘our own motives’—the given facts of our existence. Existence consists apparently of three interrelated elements of experience. First, the natural fact of being alive—without knowing how or why. Within this first element of experience we must include psychology, consciousness, though still the ignorant consciousness, of being *individually* alive, of having a separate share in the existing whole. Then comes the second element: we begin to have emotional attitudes to our existence. We

love or like this, hate or dislike that, this makes us happy, that makes us unhappy. We find that existence provides a scale of changing attitudes to existence. And this discovery is—Poetry ! Then comes the third element : we begin to *know* that, notwithstanding all our variable emotions (‘ poetic ’ attitudes), the given facts of existence are unalterable facts, and then to enlarge the number of given facts. This is Science. And the key to this dismal pattern, in which Poetry serves as a sort of servant’s off-duty afternoon—what keeps up the interest in the vicious circle of existence—can only be Politics : the dismal satisfaction of discovering that every one else is caught in the same trap as oneself, and allowing no one to fancy that he is ‘ different ’.

Such is the political taint in Day Lewis’s apparently innocent definition of poetry in relation to science and psychology—and the taint in all political argument : the insistence (vindictive insistence in the Communist mouth, a cringing insistence in the literary mouth) that we are materially identical puppets of existence. This is surely not an unfair analysis of the political disease ; the Left-minded puppet would only protest that it was not a disease, but a healthy resignation to ‘ the facts ’.

Poetry, according to Mr. Lewis, is thus in the same unfortunate position as religion in suggesting that there is something more to existence than can be scientifically ascertained. But it escapes the attack directed at religion, of being a false promise that there is anything better in existence than material enjoyments, if it describes itself as mere emotional speculation. And poetry is not only in danger of unpopularity with the Communists ; it has a long history of unpopularity, as offering less tangible hopes than the easily pictorialized hopes of religion. This inherited unpopularity is a serious disadvantage to modern poets, but some see a chance of overcoming

it if they undergo Communist conversion. The verse form, as Day Lewis points out, has an effectiveness of its own, in spite of the fact that 'even if the poet has the right ideas, he cannot get them across.' When his ideas have political backing, he can achieve great verbal triumphs. Hence: 'The first qualification of a [political] poem is that it should be a good poem—technically good, I mean.' It must, in fact, use all the traditional verbal tricks for getting at the emotions of the reader.

'Poetry . . . is also a refreshment of the emotional life,' and even if it has formal shortcomings as propaganda, man has always needed, and will always need, 'refreshment in the end'. Poetry adds an additional appeal to the logical, scientific appeal of the political theme: it makes the reader *like* it.

But there is one important distinction. Most of us to-day live in towns, and it is likely that the civilization of the future will be more and more an urban one. Now just as the rise of nineteenth-century capitalism produced the proletariat . . . so the new economic environment of town-civilization must throw up a new class of poets to express the changed emotional conditions. The stage is set for the entrance of the proletarian poet.

For, although 'bourgeois poets of recent years have drawn their material more and more from town life', they cannot be the authentic 'voice out of the machine', because they feel unhappy in the town. Poets must now try to like the political, which is to say the industrial, theme; or they will not be successful in making their readers like it. Pure Communists must be grimly sincere—but there are the 'masses', riddled with self-indulgent Capitalist emotions, and for their own good they must somehow be converted. Yet they cannot be converted, in their romantic depravity, unless some one does the dirty work of persuading them that Com-

munism is the fulfilment of all their Capitalist dreams. Who is to do the dirty work? The converted poets, of course. They are apparently easier to convert than the masses, because Communism offers them the chance of being popular with the masses—if they can convert them. But will the masses read their poems? The Communists will make them. But the masses won't obey the Communists *until* they are converted. A vicious circle. Existence, however, according to the Communists, moves in vicious circles, so the argument is logical, if not true.<sup>1</sup>

#### (d) MRS. VIRGINIA WOOLF

Thanks to the *Daily Worker*, which has opened its columns from time to time to conscience-stricken authors, we are able to observe the political flutterings of Mrs. Virginia Woolf's heart. Mrs. Woolf recently<sup>2</sup> gave her reasons why 'the artist at present is interested, actively and genuinely, in politics. For [she says] it seems that there are some people to whom this interest is suspect'. The editor, in a short note at the head of the

<sup>1</sup> In *Forward From Liberalism* (p. 36), Stephen Spender says :

'Firstly, it is necessary to recognize the achievements of capitalism. Machinery, all the instruments of production, instead of being against us, are on our side, if they are used, not for the exploitation of the majority by a small minority, but for the benefit of the whole society. Secondly, in order to reject the morality of money and success to which the lives of men [he means, surely, the capitalist minority?] are made subservient in capitalist society, it is necessary to abolish, not machinery, but the motive of profit.' The writer's job, as here stated, is to persuade the majority that it is only the 'morality of money and success' that prevents the industrial theme from being an attractive one; and then to make an attractive one of it by exchanging the motive of profit for verbal cajolery.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily Worker*, 14/12/36.

article, praised her throes of conscience while disagreeing with her reasoning, which may be summarized as follows:

It goes without saying that the writer is interested in politics, as every publisher's list and almost every book that is now published proves. The writer is more obviously fitted than the artist to engage in politics because the writer is naturally voluble whereas the artist is naturally dumb; the artist not being explicitly concerned with his model or subject, which, Mrs. Woolf suggests, is essentially of a vegetable nature—'the rose and the apple have no political views'. Nevertheless there is a tacit understanding between the artist and the State, which the State allows the artist to forget during peaceful times, but which the artist is expected to remember when occasion demands it. 'With many lapses and breaches on both sides the contract has been kept; society has accepted the artist's work in lieu of other services, and the artist, living for the most part precariously on a pittance, has written or painted without regard for the political agitations of the moment.'

'Society is not only his paymaster, but his patron.' The only times when society abandons its policy of non-interference is in periods of political crisis. During such periods art is discarded as a luxury, and must justify itself concretely. 'If the patron is neither poor nor indifferent, but dictatorial—if he will only buy pictures that will flatter his vanity or serve his politics—then again the artist is impeded, and his work becomes worthless'. The writer is expected to flatter his patron's vanity, or the patron turns nasty and becomes the bullying paymaster.

Mrs. Woolf comes close to the truth in her definition of the bargain society drives with writers. For society to-day, whether as the conventional Library public or the unconventional Left public, indeed exercises a

capricious control over literary production—so capricious that the publishers tell us it is impossible to calculate what books will sell and what will not, and one can only attempt to repeat previous successes and offer new departures in fawning fear and trembling. But she is impotently distant from an understanding of the proper relations between literature and society, because she has no clear sense of the functions of literature. She sees writers as individual ‘artists’ working in mysterious erratic privacy—which from time to time society rudely invades. Her writer, indeed, has all the characteristics of traditional ‘femininity’—with society as the big strong male who should protect and cherish his literary women-folk, but does not. She might—for all the application of her complaint to the relations between society and literature—be talking of the relations between husbands and wives. The solution, for the writer, is not ‘a room of one’s own’, but *room*. The fallacy is that the writer should look to society to supply the necessary room, use the social ruler to measure out the spaces the mind has to work in.

Society prescribes boundaries of interest and activity and offers security within these boundaries. Beyond them it provides no guarantees of security—those who want more than the officially circumscribed space must take it at their own risk. Mrs. Woolf’s plea is that the writer should get more protection from society in his extra-territorial wanderings; and her assertion of political responsibilities represents a promise that he (or she) will not forget the social hearth. In this she is not being fair to society—she is asking too much protection, too much confidence from it. A writer must take certain risks; it is his function to pass beyond the social boundaries, and he cannot expect society to assume the chivalrous role of solicitous husband to star-on-tour.



‘It [art, literature] breeds in him [the artist, the writer] a feeling for the passions and needs of mankind in the mass, which the citizen whose duty it is to work for a particular country or for a particular party has no time and perhaps no need to cultivate.’ The mental boundaries of the writer lie far outside the social boundaries, but he must explore the extra-social region at his own expense. If he tries to get ‘citizen’ backing on the ground that his explorations are in the interests of the social good (as Mrs. Woolf does here), he is probably being dishonest: social good is a matter of local ease, the importance of which the writer is reducing in not accepting the social boundaries as final ones.

What is the writer’s source of strength and reliance? Is it society and the strength that social membership gives, or is it a reliance on the integrity of his own mind as sufficient protection in the exercise of his literary function, which is the search for truth? Mrs. Woolf says: ‘Two causes of supreme importance to him are in peril. The first is his own survival: the other is the survival of his art.’ The writer who is worried about his social survival (necessarily social, since the distinction is between self and work) has no right to face the risk of being a writer. If his literary impulses are real, there is only one cause of supreme importance—getting at the truth, no matter how far from social protection it takes him.

Curiously enough, there is nothing in Mrs. Woolf’s article which would prevent its appearing, without prejudice to editorial views, in say, the *Daily Mail* or the *Blackshirt*. The sense of gratification she has afforded the Communists is merely that, as a supposedly responsible literary personage, she has supplied evidence that writers are congenitally uncertain of their social portion and susceptible to social subsidies. Mrs. Woolf does not really object to the notion of the socially subsidized writer.

Her point seems to be only that writers should be subsidized in a manner which will not offend their sensibilities : writers must not be made to feel that they are subjects of charity—it is not good for their work. So far the Communists have discovered the best way of distributing the literary dole on an objective basis : they make writers do Party work for it.

## *Politics and Literary Romanticism*

THE TERM 'ROMANTIC' has suffered a degeneration of meaning since it was first applied to the literary movement that was contemporary with the industrial revolution in England. It has come to be used as a synonym for 'unpractical', 'socially irresponsible', 'love-lorn': these are its current popular senses, in conversation and the frolics of journalism. But the original meaning of the term can be restored by referring it to its proper historical context. The romantic poet was the 'exile' from society, which nevertheless he looked upon as his ideal audience. Shelley described poets as 'the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present':<sup>1</sup> the romantic poet regarded his activities as extra-social in the special sense that the world created by his writing was the world of the future—that world in which his interests as a poet would be identical with his interests as a social being.

A poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetic creations, which participate in neither. By this assumption of the inferior office of interpreting the effect, in which after all he might acquit himself but imperfectly, he would resign a glory in the participation of the cause.<sup>2</sup>

The poets were the 'unacknowledged legislators of the world', but he regarded insistence on this immediate acknowledgement by society as a vulgarity which would corrupt poetic ideals.

<sup>1</sup> *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Stephen Spender introduces the subject in *Forward From Liberalism* (p. 28 and onwards) : ' The writer to-day whose work is not identified with the struggle to socialize the products of the mind as well as material wealth is forced back inevitably into the romantic position '. The point here seems to be that the writer cannot now be satisfied with unacknowledged legislation in his own field, but must get employment from society : he must be made immediate use of at whatever damage to his integrity, he must become a politician. ' When the greatest part of poetry is exiled by the age, so are the working-class lovers, driven out of their crowded homes to neck illegally [?] in doorways and dark corners of parks ; so is the hiker, escaping from his industrial barracks. . . . ' It is true that as a Left politician the writer does not really get social acknowledgement on a gratifying scale ; he is only exchanging forced isolation for the chosen isolation of under-doggery. But at least he is less alone than he would be as an out-and-out romantic : with him are other exiles—the hikers, the neckers and all those who also want to be, but are not, made social use of. The wrong which the hikers and the neckers suffer is not, apparently, that they haven't enough leg or neck room, but that hiking and necking are not made proper social use of. Therefore they too must become politicians, or society would not understand that hiking and necking could be socially useful.

Spender goes on to distinguish ' the romantic in life ' (who, ' instead of protesting against the world of reality, decides that he can live in two worlds, the real world and the unreal world of his or some writer's invention ') from ' the romantic artist himself ' (who ' does not write to flatter . . . he is a realist, not in the sense that he seeks to reproduce the external forms of reality, but in the sense that he is struggling to comprehend the rela-

tions of men's passional lives to the social pattern in which they are compelled to live'). This amounts to a confession that the politician-writer is romantic in some way, after all—Mr. Spender is not clear as to which way. He is certain, at any rate, that he is not 'a romantic in life'—not romantic in the popular, silly sense of the word.<sup>1</sup> All these Left lecturers, you see, feel that they are the first people to combine literature with common sense. Nevertheless, the politician-writer or politician-artist is romantic in some way: Spender is groping for the respectable historical precedent. Surely all those good people tried to connect their 'passional' experiences with their social patterns: Shelley's chemistry, his plan for draining the Tremadoc marshes, his Irish campaign? Surely they were fascinated by the brutal facts of their time and yearned to plunge back and forth—realistically—from one world into the other? But these few plunges of Shelley's were erratic, and against his real romantic instincts; and, similarly, none of the romantics sustained his Jacobin antics for very long—Jacobinism never became a literary task-master. The romantics either remained exiles; or completely socialized themselves (making use of the comforts of society rather than being made use of), like Wordsworth—ceasing to be romantics when they ceased to be exiles. In some way the contemporary writer is fatally romantic, however. Let us see how.

The key to the puzzle is in the sense in which the term 'reality' is used. The romantics thought of their poetry as representing the greater reality. Spender consistently refers to social reality as the greater; regards poetical politics (the relating of men's passional lives

<sup>1</sup> 'The Congress steadfastly set its face against any phrasemongering or romanticism.'—Harry Pollitt in the *Labour Monthly*, July 1937.

to the social pattern) as of even greater importance than poetry. This is a new corruption of the term romanticism ; we may call it ' political romanticism '. It can now be seen to apply to the extravagances of political behaviour which corrupted the romantic poets, and to the full-time preoccupation with politics which Spender demands of the writer. Thus Harry Pollitt is not a political romantic, because one assumes that he feels natively occupied by Left politics, but Lord Byron was one when he championed Greek nationalism and when he wrote *Don Juan* ; Stephen Spender was a fairly ingenuous one when he went to visit Spain and when he wrote *Vienna* ; and Auden was a quite disingenuous one when he toured the back areas and wrote *Spain* (royalties to the Spanish Medical Aid), and later continued as far as China to eat cake with Mme Chiang Kai Chek.

A political romantic exiles himself among the politicians, or among the political journalists ; the literary romantic exiles himself among the muses. And the Left writer's jargon is baptized ' revolutionary literature ', while he abuses non-political forms of escape as ' romanticism. '

The political departures of the romantic poets were frankly eccentric, and they were bad poets according as they found such gestures necessary, from impatience with their rule of romantic serenity ; and not because, as Spender implies, the departures were unsustained. In their fitfulness of behaviour the romantics frequently broke their vows to poetry ; the political romantic abandons his vow but has not the courage to admit it. This is not to recommend the romantic vow—there are other ways of influencing the world with poetry than by the strategy of Pierian retreat. But it is preferable to the half-way pledge of apostasy of the Left writer, who lingers in political gossip, and is content to let Communism do all the influencing.

In the *Daily Worker* (11th August 1937), E. C. Pettet writes :

It is curious that there should be so much cock-eyed talk about the relations between politics and literature when—even to ignore the Victorians—there is the Romantic movement so large before us, almost all of whose leaders were passionately interested in the political theories and events of their time. None of the Romantic writers, not even Shelley, has a greater significance for us to-day than Byron.

Lord Byron provides an extreme example of romantic alternation between worldliness and repentance. He concluded the preface to his first book of poetry, *Hours of Idleness*, published when he was nineteen : 'It is highly improbable, from my situation and pursuits hereafter, that I should ever obtrude myself a second time upon the public,' meaning that as a busy man of the world he would not have time to indulge in literary exploits : and seven years before his death in Greece told Thomas Moore that if he (Byron) lived ten years longer he would yet 'do' something—declaring that literature was not his true vocation. He had a snob impatience with the aristocratic snobberies ; yet poetry did not provide the stimulation that he expected as an aristocrat. So, in 1813, we find him speaking in the House of Lords against the severe punishment of the cotton frame-breakers (the Luddites)—an obvious theme for a young man starting a political career<sup>1</sup>—and then, later in the same year, exiling himself to poetry-writing : 'My parliamentary schemes are not much to my taste—I spoke twice last Session, and was told it was well enough ; but I hate the thing altogether, and have no intention to "strutt another hour" on that stage.'<sup>2</sup> His political

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Pettet cites this speech as an example of Byron's 'deep sympathy for the suffering of the oppressed and exploited masses'.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to his half-sister, Augusta, 26th March.

gestures, it seems, were after all as theatrical as his literary ones. The sentimental career proved equally disappointing. In 1804 we find him 'a little inclined to laugh at you [Augusta]; for love, in my opinion, is utter nonsense, a mere jargon of compliments, romance, and deceit'<sup>1</sup>—but involved in recurrent love-affairs from 1815 onwards. Byron described the impatience with which he resorted to these in a diary, January 1821 :

What is the reason that I have been, all my lifetime, more or less ennuyé? . . . I do not know how to answer this ; but presume it is constitutional. . . . Temperance and exercise made little or no difference. Violent passions did ;—when under their immediate influence—it is odd, but—I was in agitated, but *not* in depressed spirits. A dose of salts [Byron had a passion too for soda-water] has the effect of a temporary inebriation, like champagne, upon me. But wine and spirits make me sullen and savage to ferocity. . . .

He was looking for a career in which he could be made use of in a way that would be flattering to himself. If he were alive now he would find the Communist career more disappointing than the neo-Byrons do—because, as an aristocrat, he would demand more sparkle than it can provide. Those who give themselves to Communism in a Byronic mood will, if they are good snobs enough, desert it for the sound Byronic reason that it is depressing. One shrinks from imagining the sullen ferocity with which Lord Byron would have read Mr. Pettet's eulogy.

The romantic conception of the poet was by its nature difficult to sustain : travel and political and sentimental interruptions were inevitable, since literary experience was by definition a life apart. A state of exile cannot

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Harrow to Augusta, eight years his senior, 25th October.



be a permanent condition. Where was the real home? Poetry, its values, did not seem happily home-like to the romantics; but only because it was deserted by the mass—they felt that it should be home. They made nostalgic home-seeking experiments, and then returned to poetry, even though they were lonely and not happy there. The Left romantics are also nostalgic, but will accept permanent substitutes for home; they have not that idealistic ‘honour’ which the romantics had—they have no loyalty of residence and take lodgings anywhere. The romantics populated their exile with female associations, thereby making it alive and personal: the atmosphere in which the Left romantics reside is devoid of any such autobiographical element. For the romantic neuter of to-day political activity and political writing are the domestic centre of the universe.

Spender says: ‘The romantics did not dismiss the world of the industrial revolution from their consciousness; they appealed to other values, of Shakespeare or Greek poetry, against that world.’ If Spender means to show that an appeal to poetic values is legitimate political action, then he is helping us to prove that the best contribution a poet can make to political problems is to continue to be a poet: then he is contributing to truth as well as to politics. He is certainly right in feeling that neither the romantics nor Shakespeare nor the Greeks were political in his sense. Left criticism is apt to give the impression that the romantic ‘movement’ was a political one; but it was never co-ordinated into a movement as politicians understand the term, nor were its ends political. Spender says: ‘For the social revolutionary the problem is that which Shelley left unsolved—“to realize that which we know”. And the weapons with which we can achieve political justice are not idealist but material.’ The implication that by ‘what

we know ' Shelley meant the value of social revolution is an insult to Shelley's view of knowledge. Shelley did indeed identify knowledge with goodness, but his goodness covered a much wider moral range than that covered by Left political justice—or Left knowledge. Shelley left many problems unsolved, not merely material problems; it is to his credit that he did not attempt to find a single specific for all maladies. He saw all the problems, but was not clear enough about their interdependence to feel justified in advancing a practical plan of action. He had the discretion of his idealism.<sup>1</sup> The Left literary materialist would be correspondingly discreet if he confined himself to recommendations on a strictly material level. Instead of which he offers argument about material problems as a complete solution for all problems. The choice seems to be between straightforward idealism and super-materialist idealism; of the two, one would naturally prefer Shelley's way.

Spender says, further: ' the romantics can be divided into the willing and the unwilling ', with Keats ' the perfect example of the willing, deliberate romantic ', and

<sup>1</sup> The following show the quality of Shelley's practical discretion. In a letter to Thomas Medwin, from Pisa, 22nd August 1821, Shelley writes:

' Have you any idea, according to my counsel, of disciplining your powers to any more serious undertaking? [than some stanzas Medwin had sent Shelley]. It might at once contribute to your happiness and your success; but consider that Poetry, although its source is native and involuntary, requires in its development severe attention.'

And in a letter to Horace Smith, from Lerici, 29th June 1822, ten days before his death, writes:

' England appears to be in a desperate condition, Ireland still worse. . . . I once thought to study these affairs, and write or act in them. I am glad that my good genius said, *refrain* . . . [Shelley's italics].'



## *Standards of Truth*

FOR THE LEFT MENTALITY truth is something that can be physically demonstrated to be so ; Marxist truth consists of explanations which are really no more than physical descriptions. They seem satisfactory explanations because they are simple, but they are only simple because they are no more than descriptions—yet uttered with so much conviction that they invite assent or disagreement, as if they were explanations. It is, in fact, difficult to disagree with a Marxist account of anything. The account is both a set of facts and the deduction that the facts are so. With the deduction goes an emotion—a dislike of the facts which are so. If one tries to approach the facts in another mood than that of dislike, one is put in the position of denying the facts—which one cannot. The dislike is inseparable from the facts because the Marxist is exclusively interested in facts which evoke dislike.

One cannot criticize the Marxist explanation as untrue : it is true as far as it goes. If one tries to go further, there is always the Marxist reproof ' we are not talking about that '. The method has, indeed, the infallibility of going no further than it goes. It reminds one of the American pragmatists' dictum, That is True which Works, but is saved from the accusation of opportunism by the additional proviso that each new ' truth ' confirms other truths of the same sort, or demands further accumulation of truths of the same sort : the method does not seem to be confined to special cases because it can repeat itself in an infinite number of special cases. Scientific truth

is similar in method—Marxist truth can properly claim to be scientific. Scientific method offers a physical description as an explanation, and Marxism employs this method in the political or economic field.

But scientific method can only be applied to special cases and can only result in special truths. A Shakespearean sonnet does not answer to scientific tests, is not capable of physical confirmation. It spells truth, not a special truth: is not subject to tests of descriptive accuracy. The confirmation of poetic truth requires a capacity of knowledge; of scientific truth, only a capacity of observation. Literary or poetic truth is made of meanings; scientific truth, only of facts. It is therefore apparently more difficult to 'prove' truth in literature than in science, which relies on tests of great technical simplicity. The thought demanded by even the most specialized or advanced scientific research is essentially of a simple kind—a facility with facts; merely a greater facility of technique is required than in elementary experiment. Thus we may say that such subjects as love, pain, time, weather, falling bodies, are subjects for scientific study if they are understood in a physical sense, as material for analytic observation; but that they are subjects for literary study when attention is directed upon them from a centre of interest where to see something is to see it in relation to, not in isolation from, other things. As literary subjects they are 'universal' occasions of inquiry rather than particular questions about particular sets of facts composing the material universe. Hence the truth sought and expressed in literature is emotionally larger than scientific truth. In literature one needs to use the emotions in order to include as much variety as possible in one's perception; whereas in science one dare not use them, since one is committed to a method that makes each homo-

geneous set of facts the subject of an independent act of perception.

Old-fashioned materialism defined truth as a 'correspondence' between thought and material reality outside the mind ; and science has never really departed from this definition. Science gives an account of the world in terms of the material things and processes that comprise it, eliminating as far as possible all emotions and all personality from the account : as if, in fact, consciousness were no more than the register of a reality outside our minds. Biology, for example, regards human beings as the sum of their physical processes. Human beings are, one might say, sufficiently like the human machine-being of biology to make biology worth while—its justification is its utility. But the utility of a point of view does not establish its truth.

No amount of biological description would make it clear what a human being was really like. To describe a person you must take into account more factors than can be included in a biological description. You must consider not only how he functions as a physical type, but what he is as a person with other people—as the novelist does. Novels in fact are descriptions of people in terms of one another ; and truth in a novel is therefore a larger notion than scientific truth. The poetic notion of truth is still larger. In comparison with a poetic description of life a novel is itself scientific.

Marxism observes the materialistic principle in its definition of truth ; it gives an account of society from the point of view of productive forces, and of people in terms of the wrongs they suffer in their economic relations.

In the social production of the means of life, human beings enter into definite and necessary relations which are independent of their will—production relations which corres-

pond to a definite stage of the development of their productive forces. The totality of these production relations constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis upon which a legal and political superstructure arises and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of the material means of life determines, in general, the social, political and intellectual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of human beings which determines their existence, but conversely it is their social existence which determines their consciousness.

(Marx : Preface to *Critique of Political Economy*.)

This is a basic Marxist formula—the materialist principle applied to society. It is well worth examining because it is used as a guiding principle for all Marxist interpretation of the ‘superstructure’: literature, art, law, philosophy, scientific theory, and ‘life’. It is at first glance so circumstantially obvious as to paralyse criticism: we must eat, we must work in order to eat, in order to work we must participate in the economic relations of our time, and in doing so we develop a ‘social consciousness’—a sense of personal dependence upon the whole remote economic organism. But upon reflexion the passage must provoke either a strong contempt for ourselves—if this is to be taken for true; or indignation that so primitive a formula should be offered to us as the truth about ourselves. We grant that the economic structure has the importance of satisfying our economic wants, and that its failure to do so accounts for politics. But then we ask: does life contain nothing, is life nothing, besides a constant preoccupation with these wants?

The Marxist interpretation of what goes on in life, as here stated, leaves out very nearly everything that we mean by life. Personal relations and communication, pleasures, tastes, ambitions other than economic ones, the non-economic uses of the mind and the emotions—

all these are disregarded because they do not happen from economic determinism, 'independently of our wills'. The Marxist account of things ignores what happens in our leisure-time because it is only what we do when we are not being used as machines by machines. But are people as miserably enslaved by their jobs as he makes out? Many people get on well with their employers and fellows, do in fact enjoy their jobs—may be regarded as having freely chosen them. Others make the best of their bad jobs by taking them lightly, perhaps by trying to treat them humorously; though economically determined. The first sort might accept the Marxist account as a technical report by unimaginative people; the second would agree that the dull thing should be described dully. But neither would feel that their social (or as the Marxist would say, socio-economic) existence determined their intellectual processes.

The only processes besides the productive ones to which the Marxist formula might be applied are the biological ones. But does any one recognize himself in either the biological or economic mirror? The only time a person looks into these mirrors is when he is worn-out or angry with his boss, or hungry or ill. People complain that poetry is beyond them. But why is not so drastically simple a myth as the Marxist one universally accepted? We must suppose that people who do accept the Marxist description of themselves want to see less of themselves than is really there.

The Marxist notion of what truth is appears to be more comprehensive than it really is. Marxist definitions can be divided into two parts, the technical description and the generalization derived from it. But the generalization is to a large degree an abstract one, since it can only be applied to things that yield to Marxist description. It is this element of abstraction that makes



the Marxist definitions seem comprehensive, and secure from the accusation of abstraction: the Marxist can always point to the concrete element. What happens when we try to apply the Marxist generalization broadly? We pile up statistics of 'conditions in other countries', or in the past. They are all of the same kind as the original facts on which the Marxist bases his supposedly life-illuminating generalization. We are not allowed to fill out this blank picture with fancy to relieve the monotony; if we do, that is false—therefore the Marxist picture is true. We must keep strictly to the Marxist guide-book, and visit no other countries than those indicated.

But there are other approaches, in which the facts are understood as clues to a larger story of existence. What do we want? A story corresponding with the facts, consisting only of facts—or showing us ourselves as integrated beings, not mere collections of circumstances. Novels show us ourselves in group setting. Poems show us ourselves in universal setting. Literature does not, like Marxism, attempt to give an account of 'life' that is statistically adequate for the moment, but to afford us a view of ourselves free of temporal bias.

An account of life from the point of view of productive forces or production-relations necessarily eliminates all the complex personal, emotional and intellectual aspects of people's relations with one another; and similarly reduces the conception of truth to an artificial, banalistically objective one. Production-relations are limited by the elementary aims which production has; they have statistical but little individual reality. The Marxist employs statistics to corroborate his disregard of personal character and motives as causes of what happens in social life, and to illustrate the obviousness of his truth. Statistics can only afford the

simplest kind of conclusions, and are only of value when it can also be shown that the material chosen for study cannot be otherwise interpreted—that is, the narrower the meaning of which the material is capable, the more statistical value it has. Money is a good subject for statistical investigation because money itself is a kind of data from which the more complex elements of exchange have been already eliminated. Marxist speculation has the quality of speculation upon financial statistics—its values are cash values, and all the more miserably simple and obvious therefore.

Another fundamental Marxist axiom is stated at the beginning of the *Communist Manifesto* :

The history of all human society, past and present [except the history of the primitive community, Engels added], has been the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, baron and serf, guild-burgess and journeyman—in a word, oppressor and oppressed—stood in sharp opposition to each other. They carried on perpetual warfare, sometimes masked, sometimes open and acknowledged. . . . Our own society, the bourgeois age, is distinguished by this—that it has simplified class antagonisms. More and more society is splitting up into two great hostile camps. . . .

Again, it is difficult to reject the axiom categorically. The Marxist would not deny that other things happened in history than class struggle, but he would call the other things 'subjective'. The class struggle is to him a subjective reality that he would like to make objectively true for every one. Marxist history is, and avowedly, tendentious. All historians have some principle of selection by means of which they disengage the primary historical realities from the recorded bulk of facts. The usefulness of historical writing is entirely bound up with the principle of selection adopted. For example, if we

set out to write a history of the rise of capitalism, we might select those facts which illuminate the difference between goods-distribution in the craft period and in the early industrial period : our principle would be contrast. If our purpose were to contrast the periods to the disfavour of capitalism, then the writing would be tendentious ; and yet our method, contrast, would be legitimate. Much history is tendentious in this way, but difficult to accuse of complete futility because it does elicit facts which are recognizably so.

Similarly, it is difficult to deny that the Marxist view of history is true. It is true within the scope of interest governed by its principle of selection : as a history of class struggle it can claim the merit of great factual simplicity. But when factual simplicity is the object, the historian should be the more on his guard against admitting a tendentious point of view into his account. The sensitive historian, at least, would be ashamed to base a point of view upon an isolated set of facts. Why is the Marxist unashamed of his tendentious rendering of history ? Because he does not regard himself as an historian—it is we who are supposed to do that in order that we shall accept his class-struggle view of the past and begin to struggle sympathetically in the present.

There are two methods of writing history ; the scientific method and the literary method. The scientific method is to choose a strand of the experience of the past and to analyse it to the minutest degree possible. The literary method is to assemble within a general frame as many elements of a given aggregate of historical phenomena as possible, with the object of discovering their relative importance. Marxist history employs the scientific method but ruins its value as a scientific account by using its data to fill out a preconceived picture of human behaviour. The literary method is introduced

to suggest a wide scope of social significance, and the scientifically chosen facts are treated as all the elements within the frame of social history. This strategy eliminates the need of subordinating one factor to another, by selecting only one factor, the class struggle—which, let us note, is ‘masked’ when it is not ‘open and acknowledged’.

In what, then, is the appeal of Marxist history supposed to lie? If we could regard it as a scientific demonstration, its appeal would be to our appreciation of accuracy. But some other response is expected of us. Beyond the appeal of accuracy, historical writing can make an appeal to the sympathies. But no, Marxist history is not sympathetic. As what, then, are we to regard it, if not as history? The cliché answer is: as propaganda for Marxism. Rather an anti-climax, to be reduced by a conscientious analysis of Marxist history to a careless bourgeois cliché! We should, of course, understand this at the first page of our Marxist book. Then, instead of being brought to the low point of uttering clichés, we should read something else.

In addition to the scientific method of seeing everything from the point of view of the productive forces, production relations, and the class struggle, Marxists use the dialectical formulæ of Hegel as a philosophic method. Marxists say that these provide a useful technique for describing development, movement, change. The class struggle itself, they say, is an example of dialectical development by contradiction; man’s descent from the apes is an example of the change of ‘quantity into quality’; and even caterpillars develop dialectically—the caterpillar ‘negates’ itself and becomes a chrysalis, which in turn becomes, by a process of ‘negation of the negation’, a butterfly. So life can be reduced to philosophical simplicity for the purpose

of—what? Engels sums up the position in *Ludwig Feuerbach* :

In the eyes of dialectic philosophy, nothing is established for all time, nothing is absolute or sacred. On everything and in everything it sees the stamp of inevitable decline ; nothing can resist it save the unceasing process of formation and destruction, the unending ascent from the lower to the higher—a process of which that philosophy itself is only a simple reflection within the thinking brain.

Matter eternally supersedes mind, in the Marxist materialist view. Therefore all we can do is to offer (eternally) physical descriptions in explanation of things. Physical things are not true to themselves—they change, disappear. Therefore physical descriptions can only be relatively true. Therefore Truth itself consists of laws of change—‘ dialectics ’ (‘ the science of the general laws of motion both of the external world and of human thinking ’—Marx). The material world is real because it is in process of disappearance. We, too, are part of the universal fidgets, but as thinking beings we have a greater resistance to change than material things have ; our greater resistance gives us time to reflect on our position.

Indeed, human beings long ago faced the problem of change and came to sane terms with themselves about it. As soon as they became conscious of themselves as minds, existence took on more meaning than that of mere material change. When people attach supreme importance to the problem of change, they are really projecting themselves back into their evolutionary past in order to escape from the more advanced problems of existence.

Religion directed the attention of people away from their entailment in material change ; it gave them all the emotions of dealing with the more advanced problems by making a show of asking all the advanced questions.

Poetry offers more truth than religion, though less hope—less opportunity for self-deception. Philosophy offers a temporary refuge from the problem of physical impermanence, in theories which do not themselves pretend to be permanent—the consolation is in opposing to the impermanence of matter theories about matter which are only as right as you care to allow. And now the Marxists offer, in the philosophy of materialist dialectics, an escape from a miserable evolutionary past into a future of applied evolution: ‘the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point however is to *change* it’ (Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*). In escaping from the past into the future, there is no time, of course, for taking the present seriously.

*Standards of Literary Judgement*

BY 'STANDARD' we mean either an arbitrary quantity like a foot or a pound weight, or a quality of performance. Standards of cooking, for example, are of the second kind; they depend on values which are not scientifically measurable but created in the process of cooking. A standard in this sense denotes capacity: what capacity do you allow to cooks? A critical view of the cook's capacity would involve a definition of the ends of cooking—good meals. By scientific standards, cooking would be regarded as a process through which the cook had to go; the judgement would not be according to the meals produced, but according to the behaviour of the cook during the process—his obedience to it. So, when writing is regarded as a process that it is necessary to go through, there is no standard but the process itself. If it is seen as a socially determined process in the aggregate social process of life, then the judgement is in terms of the writer's obedience to social compulsion. No object of writing is conceived beyond that of going through the process in a way that confirms a principle of social compulsion. The Left critic can thus find the writing of a 'bourgeois' writer respectable as it demonstrates that he was forced by his social environment to write as he did. Any writing which provides a tidy political demonstration is good literary meat to the Left critic.

It is a common assumption of literary criticism that the sources of literature are irrelevant or unimportant, and that literature can be completely criticized in terms of literature . . .

But as soon as one passes from the enjoyment or creation of art works to the criticism of art, then it is plain that one passes outside art, that one begins to look at it from 'outside'. But what is outside art? Art is the product of society, as the pearl is the product of the oyster, and to stand outside art is to stand inside society.

(*Illusion and Reality*, Introduction; Christopher Caudwell: Macmillan, 1937).

The Left critic considers writing as a process, as a part of a cross-section view of life in action. Its ends can only be that of keeping the process alive. What is our standard for a process, for obedience to a process? It is—economy of process. Stakhanovite standards, for example, mean more produce, but not more pleasure, understanding, or intensification of the details of production. So the literary Stakhanovite simplifies critical language by ruling out the literary aspect of writing.

Left critics regard writing as a potential instrument or 'weapon', define it in social not personal terms. The source of stimulation for one piece of writing must be the same as for another—social facts. Writing that does not derive from social facts is irrelevant; writing that uses the facts for other purposes than social demonstration is untrue. By Left critical standards, therefore, all good writing has in common a background of chosen social facts—is a means of stressing what is socially urgent. Obviously, two good pieces of writing have something in common. The Communist defines this common element as sameness of process: the aggregate social process consists of all the processes of survival, society's part in this is to survive, the writer's part is to formulate contemporary society's attitude to its fate.

Communist criticism limits the attitude which the writer may adopt on behalf of society to one of militant



self-protection—of the weaker against the stronger elements. Any writing which may be regarded as showing society's attitude to itself is valued, but no writing is held to have survival quality which does not voice the social attitude of protest. Writers in the past whose work is eloquent of social facts but nevertheless devoid of a clear accent of protest would have been all right if there had been a Communist Party to help them. Adverse Communist criticism consists of one of two complaints: either not enough economic facts are taken care of, or the reactions to them are wrong or not strong enough. Facts themselves are economically determined, but reactions are according to sensitiveness to the force of social logic. The usefulness of literature is that it shows how the outstanding (i.e. unpleasant) facts should lead inevitably to the class reaction in every kind of person. The Communist pattern of life is the economic unit, but marginal room is allowed for extending economic to social meaning; and literature can make a quasi-identity between people as evolutionary beings and as individuals.

By this view of literature you may legitimately write only what you are socially forced to write. If you want to write something more than you are socially forced to write, then you do more than merely keep up the process—you produce mere writing; you are an individual and not a social being, and society cannot give its sanction to what you write. The writer is a danger to Communism if he regards himself as a free authority, not socially compelled. He will introduce more than the Communist reality can hold—something by which, therefore, Communism can be criticized as inadequate. All non-Communist writing is bound to be regarded by the Communists as in some insidious way an attack on Communism.

The Communist critic decrees that the writer is properly the spokesman of society, but he is mistaken in assuming that the interests of society as an economic or political unit, at a particular time, can inspire a genuine impulse to write. Society as such represents a mixture of interests. The writer feels impelled to create harmony between the various interests—but the interest of creating harmony is his own, not society's : society as a whole can have no single interest of harmony, being itself a loose synthesis of interests. It can have a common interest of self-preservation, but there is no such thing as a social mind : society has no personality. The only place where harmonious evaluation can be made is in the mind of the writer—using the term ' writer ' to mean one who is capable of articulate correlation. Only those will be in sympathy with him whose minds have a similar interest of harmony. It is exclusively with these minds that he has identity of interest, although the interest is essentially for the benefit of all.

The Communist writer is supposed to appeal to a social mind, although Communists know that the social mind does not exist—until the Communist Party has created it out of mass ignorance, otherwise known as the ' mass mind '. They cannot hope to create anything very wise or subtle, since the mind thus created can only imitate mental co-ordination by action co-ordinated from the point of view of self-interest—can only be the economic mind. The writer who invites sympathy from economically-minded people may win a much larger public than the writer who appeals to people who are not thus limited, but the identity of interest between him and his public ends with economic interest. The Communist writer is helped to narrow his appeal by the organization of a public trained to respond to no other than the economic appeal, whose reactions can be

gauged in advance—for example, the Left Book Club. The organization of this public is the critic's work : in Communism the critic comes before the writer. If the critic has done his work properly, then the public will be ready to want the books which the writer is being trained to write as soon as they appear.

In *The Novel and the People*,<sup>1</sup> Ralph Fox was seemingly scolding the novelists of the past for their social remissness, but really praising the portended Communist novelists who will not annoy critics by writing novels.

RABELAIS and CERVANTES, the real founders of the novel, were more fortunate than their successors in that they did not live in the new society of which they were the heralds. They were men of the transition period, children of the revolutionary storms which broke up medieval feudalism, and they were inspired by the greatest flow of new ideas, the most exciting rebirth that man has ever known in his history (leaving aside the vexed question of whether or not we are to-day again entering on such a period) (p. 50).

[DEFOE.] Throughout the eighteenth century *Robinson Crusoe* was used as the basis for lectures in political economy (p. 38).

[FIELDING, RICHARDSON and STERNE.] The fact is that neither the view of Fielding on reality nor the view of Richardson and Sterne is a complete one. . . . [They were merely] the forerunners of a revolution in the novel. . . . It is a vain thing to wish a writer had possessed qualities he most obviously did not have. . . . Richardson's failings have inevitably if unjustly reduced him to the position of a museum piece, from being a living writer to an historical and literary 'influence' (p. 55).

[SCOTT.] Why did Scott fail in his immense task ? Because impenetrable blinkers obscured his vision (p. 61).

[JANE AUSTEN.] It had become impossible for the novelist to see his people truly. Even Jane Austen, who almost succeeded, surrenders with every character (p. 62).

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence and Wishart, 1937.

THACKERAY disliked the new bourgeoisie and showed his dislike plainly, in scorching satire (p. 62).

[DICKENS and SCOTT.] Why shall we find something lacking in the heroes of Dickens and Scott? It was because they could not see through the surface respectability of their society to the progressive degradation of man going on beneath (p. 64).

Though the Communist critic cannot admit any of the traditional standards of literature, he must use existing material in order to formulate his standard—which he does by translating his economic bias into a formula of scolding. If there were a respectable quantity of Communist literature in existence, with a large number of sympathetic readers, then he would not even have to formulate a standard. His standard is really a means of scolding the slowness of the contemporary writer in producing the literature which the public is being slowly trained to want. If the writing, reading and economic processes were properly co-ordinated and in full operation, then the standard would be in their automatic ever-sameness—what Ralph Fox described as ‘the whole procession of creation’.

The Communist novel will not be what is ordinarily understood by the term ‘novel’, but a monument of social accountancy. The term ‘novelist’ is retained because it indicates that Communist society can forcibly direct people of widely different temperaments into the same groove of political determinism. The resulting novel will interpret people factually—deduce human types from the economic processes. The novelist is indulgently allowed to give them names and describe them as individuals; it is not really necessary, or economically illuminating to do so, but the novelist has had a difficult past and cannot be expected to recover immediately.

The Left critic is not, in fact, interested in the mind which operates in writing. His real measure of value for literature is the Left economic treatise : how much tendentious information does it represent ? Storm Jameson, in *Fact*, July 1937, suggests that 'the literary equivalent of the documentary film' would provide the standard for which the Socialist writer is looking : 'his job is not to tell us what he felt, but to be coldly and industriously presenting, arranging, selecting, discarding from the mass of his material to get the significant detail, which leaves no more to be said, and implies everything'. Storm Jameson refers to a document on Durham and Tyneside conditions drawn up by two women doctors for the Council of Action : 'They are not documents in the proper sense of the word ; they are not full enough ; they do not give the essential details of speech and action. . . . We do not *see* the woman stripping the filthy, bug-ridden wall-paper from the thin wall of her attic ; nor the pregnant woman waiting her turn for the lavatory which serves eight families. . . .'

To put the political value of what you are writing above its possible value as a generally true account is to be class-conscious. In the ordinary worker's account of an industrial community, information value would not be put above all other values. He would report the various trivialities that made up the life of the community from his point of view, but he would not stress the economic trivialities ; he would not stress any one set of trivialities at the expense of any other. The writer, however, must know how to extract the major realities from the daily complex of trivialities. The Communist politician wants to stress the economic realities, not because they are of truly major importance, but in order to concentrate exclusively on them. It is not wrong to concentrate exclusively on them if you regard yourself

as an economic observer, but it is wrong for the writer to take advantage of the ease with which political stress can be laid. It is the writer's responsibility to discover where the major stress in a daily or universal complex really lies. If a writer were to do as Storm Jameson suggests, he would be dishonestly using the obvious political stress as the stress of truth : he would be getting an effect of truth without doing very much work. Perhaps it is logical that the Communist, who is interested in reducing the amount of work people do, should thus influence writers to reduce the amount of theirs—to limit its implications. To imply 'everything' in the Communist literary sense is to limit the implications to economic ones. If you are a Communist this is to imply 'everything'—the rest is silence.

Mr. R. D. Charques, in a book of Left criticism,<sup>1</sup> says : 'The proletarian novel cannot be mature art, since it belongs to a period of social transition'. The proletarian novel belongs, rather, to a period of individual transition. It is written either by the person of working-class origin who severs himself from his working-class upbringing and pursuits in order to become a writer—like D. H. Lawrence or James Hanley ; or by the intellectual who begins as a literary patron of working-class wrongs and ends as a politician—like Disraeli, Mussolini or Richard Goodman.<sup>2</sup> Of the two, the intellectual is the less certain of himself. The person of working-class origin has a domestic reality behind him which remains real to him in spite of imposed literary

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Literature and Social Revolution*, Martin Secker, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> 'Auden and Isherwood cannot continue on this track for long. They will be faced with the alternative of . . . turning to the real world, the world of present day society, and actively playing a part in that society.'—Richard Goodman, sometime poet, exhorts two fellow Lefts to supplement intellectual with active desertion to Left politics (*Daily Worker*).

artificialities—as with Lawrence ; the intellectual tries to make a realistic approach to working-class sentiment in politics, but here he is confined to the fancies of Socialist rhetoric.

Mr. Charques says that ‘ the class-conscious novelist is no better as a novelist for championing the proletarian instead of the ruling-class cause ’. This is not the official Communist view, as well expressed by Mr. Alick West in the *Daily Worker* : ‘ [someone has said that the terms] bourgeois and proletarian can only be used descriptively, not as judgements of value. But what other basis is there for judgements of value ? Our life being the fight between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, how can we judge value by something outside the fight ? ’

The Left critic approaches literature with suspicion ; whenever writing does not evince the proper respect for the ragged-trouserred theme, it is suspect as a product of leisure—and during leisure-time all sorts of irrelevant thoughts are introduced. Andrew Robert Burn strikes a typical Communist note in *The World of Hesiod* (p. 144) : ‘ Athletics, poetry and music were the play of the Greek nobles, the occupation of their leisure and the most harmless outlet for their surplus energy.’

In conclusion it should be useful to give some illustrations of the general quality of Left literary judgement :

What one finds in Eliot is a remarkable capacity for cerebral experience, a remarkable gift of annotation, a remarkable neglect of nature. Owen’s poetry, on the other hand, exists by its reference to some external object : if it had not been the War, it might have been the industrial towns, and the depressed areas (Stephen Spender, *The Destructive Element*).

To Shakespeare, drawing his views from Rabelais and Montaigne, there would have appeared nothing outrageous in the Marxian view of life (Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People*).

Unlike the life of beasts, the life of the simplest tribe requires a series of efforts which are not instinctive, but which are demanded by the necessities of a non-biological economic aim—for example, a harvest. Hence the instincts must be harnessed to the needs of the harvest by a social mechanism. . . . Thus poetry, combined with dance, ritual, and music becomes the great switchboard of the instinctive energy of the tribe. . . . Sweetened with a harvest song, the work goes well. . . . For poetry describes and expresses not so much the grain in its concreteness, the harvest in its factual essence—which it helps to realize and which are the conditions for its own existence—but the emotional, social and collective complex which is the tribe's relation to the harvest. It expresses a whole new world of truth—its emotion, its comradeship, its sweat, its long-drawn-out wait and happy consummation—which has been brought into being by the fact that man's relation to the harvest is not instinctive and blind but economic and conscious. Not poetry's abstract statement—its content of facts, but its dynamic role in society—its content of collective emotions, is therefore poetry's *truth* (*Illusion and Reality*, by Christopher Caudwell, Macmillan, 1937).

That the progress made by Auden—and the much smaller progress made by Spender in *Vienna*—is due almost entirely to the fact that they have been in contact with a mass struggle, confirms the impression that only when the British Labour movement has developed a really fighting unity will it be possible for really revolutionary poetry to be written. That Auden—and to a lesser extent Spender—are by now more or less technically equipped for immediately seizing upon such a movement when it comes is obvious, at least in Auden's case, from *Spain* (*Perspectives for Poetry*, an article by Richard Goodman, *Daily Worker*).

The following are taken from articles printed in the *Daily Worker* in a series entitled, 'The Past is Ours':

These poems [Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*] said in effect that only in the peasantry, who were now being expropriated by the manufacturers, those feelings of human solidarity



lived through which liberty, equality, fraternity could be won (Alick West, *Wordsworth was torn between old and new*).

One example will illustrate how continuously and vividly Shelley's poetic vision was one with his scientific knowledge. He speaks in *The Cloud* of 'sunbeams with their convex gleams'. Why convex? Because Shelley had learned that the course of a ray through the atmosphere is concave towards the earth, and therefore to the Cloud above it, from whose standpoint everything in the poem is seen, would appear convex. The scientific quality of Shelley's poetry about nature is inseparable from his exultation in freedom. . . . As Shelley's social vision of freedom cleared, so his vision deepened of the multitudinous motion of matter, of which human freedom is the highest form (Alick West, *How Shelley fought for Liberty*).

The culture of the English capitalist class in its period of growth was expressed in the poetry of Marlowe, Shakespeare and Milton. After the great revolution of the seventeenth century had finally decided the direction that class was to take in its fight for power and expansion, there came the age of prose. . . . Edward Gibbon wrote in his autobiography that 'the romance of *Tom Jones*, that exquisite picture of human manners, will outlive the palace of the Escorial and the imperial eagle of the house of Austria'. The eagle of the house of Austria is dead, and Fascist guns are to-day battering to pieces the palace of the Escorial, but *Tom Jones* is still a glorious and living part of our heritage (Ralph Fox, *Henry Fielding, Prose-age genius*).

The fundamental criticism of his poetry is a simple one. He mistook the American shadow of democracy for the substance (E. C. Pettet, *Walt Whitman and his 'Great Idea'*).

*Standards of Poetry*

POLITICAL STATEMENT must serve political aims, and must face certain tests in defining them : does it clarify this problem of community life, does it point to the liquidation of that social wrong ? If the distinction between the poet and the politician is to remain a real one, it must be based upon a distinction between their aims. The politician's aim is to preserve an orderly social routine ; the poet can go this far with the politician in that he too has an interest of order. But the poet's interest of order is an all-inclusive one, not merely an interest of social order ; the order which it is his responsibility to define cannot be stated in political terms. It must be an order for the entire scope of life, and this cannot be realized by beginning with external elements of order ; it must be impelled from within, begin in the mind. The politician has no aim of providing a complete picture of existence in which all the elements are seen in their true relation. Properly speaking, his subject is that of social equilibrium ; his interest, that of liquidating social difficulties as they arise and preserving order in its temporal, physical aspects. The poet's interest is always : more poetry. The politician's interest can never legitimately be more political activity rather than less, since that would mean more political uncertainty rather than less. He is supposed to be working toward a condition of society when he will not be necessary.

A poem may be regarded as combining the poet's and the politician's aims in the sense that poetic values may

be applied to everything as a measure of ultimate good ; there is no inconsistency in a politician's seeking inspiration in poems if his aim is the legitimate one of removing political distractions from our minds. The clearing process would be political, but his object would be to make room for permanent realities. That is, politicians may honestly sympathize with poets, and poets with politicians, if it is understood between them that the politician's aim is merely political. But when a poem is regarded as an instrument for use at the political level of language, political appeal is equated with poetic appeal. Thus, the Left critic admires the following passage from Shelley as combining the aims of poetry and politics. Yet as politics it cannot be regarded as defining or solving any particular political problem. What then can the identical value be which it has as a poetic and a political piece of writing ? Only the value of rhetoric.

And behold, thrones were kingless, and men walked  
 One with the other even as spirits do,  
 None fawned, none trampled ; hate, disdain, or fear,  
 Self-love, or self-contempt on human brows  
 No more inscribed, as o'er the gate of hell,  
 ' All hope abandon ye who enter here ' ;  
 None frowned, none trembled, none with eager fear  
 Gazed on another's eye of cold command,  
 Until the subject of a tyrant's will  
 Became, worse fate, the abject of his own,  
 Which spurred him, like an outspent horse, to death.  
 (*Prometheus Unbound*, scene iv.)

Shelley is actually making here not a political appeal, but a definition of a moral world, which should be attractive to every one whatever his politics may be.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ' Let this opportunity be conceded me of acknowledging that I have, what a Scotch philosopher characteristically terms, " a passion for reforming the world. . . ." But it is a mistake to suppose

It has inadequacies from the poetic point of view in that he is describing this world in political metaphors : it is simple-minded. But it would be unfair to call it political because of this.

The political poem is supposed to solve two kinds of problems at once, a local problem of community life and a general problem of existence. It must face two different kinds of tests—unless one contends that a poem is better politics as it is a better poem. No Left would say that the political test is a literary test. He would say that the literary test must contain a political test. What form could the political test take ? The best that the Left could do in the way of a political test would be to compare the opinions in the poem with his own political opinions. If he finds them the same, he may yet argue that he demands something more than agreement : he expects the poet to feel the political emotions with a superior intensity. But the poet could express his more intense feelings on a political issue in conversation or prose writing—given permission to use extreme language. So why the poem, unless the political emotions are submitted to a purely literary test ?

As to the political effects of a poem one can only inquire how many people agree with it on political grounds, are fired by the violence of its language. It would clearly be very difficult to measure what increase in political activity the poem has caused ; yet only by some such statistical examination can it justify itself

that I dedicate my poetical compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform, or that I consider them in any degree as containing a reasoned system on the theory of human life. Didactic poetry is my abhorrence ; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence . . . ' (*Prometheus Unbound*, Preface).

politically from the Left point of view. And, once the test has shifted to the statistical plane, it cannot be a poem that is being tested: we are testing the state of political opinion. This, in fact, is what Left critics look for in a poem—its usefulness as a means of sounding and pressing for opinion. The Left poet is seen as forcing people to have political opinions who would not otherwise feel politically, as eliciting more statistical evidence of political backing. For example, when the *Daily Worker* condemns Kipling as ‘an imperialist poet’, it really means that he has erred in collecting statistical evidence of imperialist opinion rather than revolutionary opinion. The *Observer*, however, in describing Kipling as ‘one of the makers of Britain’, is not thinking of him as a poet at all. It is the disingenuousness of Left criticism that makes it the greater enemy of poetry—in that it identifies poetry with politics as Conservative criticism would never dare to do. This may be due merely to a failure of organization on the part of Conservative politicians; but the fact is that the literary criticism of a Conservative is less political than the literary criticism of a Left.

In Soviet Russia the political organization of literature is seen in full action. Stephen Spender recalls a poem by a Soviet poet denouncing as sons of bitches the Red Army generals sentenced to death for espionage.<sup>1</sup> Spender pretends to be offended by this, though it is what one would naturally expect when the politicization of poetry is carried to its logical extreme. Given vigorous economic development along Left lines, this is the kind of vigorous result you get in literary development. Rupert Brooke’s war-sonnets provide an example of an unprofessional attempt to combine poetry and

<sup>1</sup> *Fact*, No. 4. The poem was originally printed in *Pravda*, 12/6/37. The poet was later executed as a Trotskyist wrecker.

nationalistic idealism : since he was not directed by a patriotic organization he could be no more than a literary sentimentalist of nationalism. Stephen Spender, in deprecating the tyranny of Communism while regarding it as a new source of vitality for poetry, is speaking as a literary sentimentalist : he looks to Left politics for idealistic inspiration rather than practical direction. So he hankers for an English ' St. John of the Cross ' whose ' task it will be to experience imaginatively and to recreate the vast tracts of life documented with great genius by Marx in *Das Kapital*. ' (*Fact*, July 1937.)

If, as a poet, you appeal to political authority as the judge of your integrity, the test you face is not a severe one—merely the dogma of those who hold the right opinions, the ones you have previously chosen in order to be on the right side. Those who do not agree with your opinions will not enjoy your poetry, but at any rate their judgement is previously ruled out as worthless. As a poet you are not responsible for determining what are the right opinions—that is the Left politician's job ; but you must establish your reputation as a distinguished sympathizer. This you do as a critic, by scolding the non-political poets of the past, or by praising other Left poets, or by appearing on the political platform in defence of culture against Fascist politics. Having established yourself with the right political party, almost anything you write as poetry will be automatically accepted, provided that it is not too illiterate or verbally amateurish. You will not be required to make a weighty contribution to Left opinion ; only to provide loose, emotional ramblings, as relief from the arduous dullness of political opinions pure and simple, for those who need some journalistic glamour with their politics. If you show yourself to be rather vague on points of dogma and yet enthusiastic, you are

not merely saving yourself from political attack on your work : you are 'helping'.

You may even admit your distaste for political activity as a poet :

To-morrow for the young poets exploding like bombs,  
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion ;  
    To-morrow the bicycle races  
Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-day  
    the struggle.

To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death,  
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder ;  
    To-day the expending of powers  
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.  
(From *Spain*, by W. H. Auden : Faber and Faber, 1937.)

These lines are a chaotic sequence of false contrasts and false associations, a medley of echoes, but the Left reader is supposed to find in them exciting sublimation of his political opinions. He is here allowed to forget his opinions—only, however, because the poet-psychologist employed to help him do this has been o-kayed by the Party, or by Comrade Gollancz of the Left Book Club, on the ground of his opinions. (It is a little obscure what part Comrade Faber and Comrade Faber play in all these manœuvres.) Spender's comment is that the poem 'succeeds because Auden limits himself to an almost theoretical, certainly a bird's-eye view of the war, rigidly excluding the elements of personal experience'. But Spender does not say in what the poem succeeds. It fails certainly as journalism because it has no information value. It is not orthodox Left rhetoric, the vocabulary of which is rich in vilifying terms and phrases. Auden obviously meant to improve on that vocabulary—give something less boring. Is it less boring? Is the prospect of to-morrow or young poets

exploding, or abstract people walking beside an unidentified lake for weeks of perfect agreement in political opinion, except when they break off for bicycle races—is this less boring than the politician's account of, say, the virtues of the Five Year Plan? It is sillier, granted, but not less boring for that. What is the poem's success as a method for conveying the atmosphere of a war that is going on? As Spender himself admits, there are no elements of personal experience in it: and there are no military details. It is by some one who, we know, had no personal experience of the war, did not deliberately increase his chances of death, commit necessary murder, stir himself to write the flat ephemeral pamphlet or organize the boring meeting. No sense of struggle is conveyed at all; the atmosphere of the poem is one of condescension—the poet is theoretically aware that certain disturbances are going on, and is reporting himself as theoretically but not really disturbed by them. We must look on poets of this sort as indolent scribblers escaping from their literary responsibilities by taking the pseudo-heroic, pseudo-political way to honour. In appropriating to their literary advantage the vaguely Communistic theme, they are practising a form of plagiarism: in poems of this kind, in fact, other forms of plagiarism are unnecessary.

A political poem takes advantage of current excitement on public topics. The Left reader knows in what emotions he wants further stimulation, and values the poem as it contributes to his hysteria. What are the emotions in which Lefts specialize? Love of the wronged, feelings of benevolently destructive power, loyalty to their antagonisms, excitement in their sense of superior altruism—those emotions are real from which Left opinions can be derived. Economic facts are not enough in themselves to inspire the opinions. The fact



of low wages does not produce the opinion that one must act to remedy this : it moves only the few people who form their opinions on intellectual grounds. But political action needs the support of large numbers, and these can only be drawn in by an emotional appeal. Stephen Spender says mysteriously : 'The function of a political poetry is vividly to bring into our consciousness the origins in life from which political theory and action spring.' By 'our consciousness' he must mean the consciousness of those to whom the troubles of other people are not real. The Left politician is concerned with his theory rather than with affairs of humanity ; he does not need to have emotions himself, but he needs emotionally aroused people to put his theory into practice.

The poet must be constantly on guard against appealing to emotions which are outside the scope of political interests ; he is seen as an agent preparing people for the politician. The poet must be on hand to stimulate the required emotions to the required political heat. At this point the gentle reader is feeling like a lion, and can be handed on roaring to the politician.

Spender quotes Jack Lindsay :

I rose from the bed of my wife's young body  
at the call of liberty.  
O feed with my blood our flag's red flame.  
Comrades remember me.

His comment is : 'These lines are not bad because there are no conceivable conditions in which one man might experience the sensations they record, but because this man's case is represented as typical, so that the lines have the air of a generalization'. He does not say that the experience here recorded is repulsively insincere. His objection is that the political reference is not

sufficiently obvious. Not everybody rises from the young bodies of wives to the call of liberty. There are old bodies of wives to be considered, and calls to breakfast. The poet must take into consideration that, although he may be 'typical' in being so warmly Left, his reader may not be so 'typical'.

A great deal of Left writing has the object of trying to make the reader imagine what it is like to be a wage-slave. But first the Left writer must himself imagine what this feels like, which he does by restating anti-capitalist rhetoric with an accent of personal indignation. He treats it as a problem of language: to purify the rhetoric of its intellectual heaviness and speak with emotionally irresistible simplicity. But this has all been done before, and better, by Old Testament Socialists. If one wants moving poetic comments on economic injustice, there is no need to go to the Communists:

O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man.

(Psalm xliii. 1.)

A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is His delight.

When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.

Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.

(Proverbs xi. 1, 2 and 4.)

He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that shall pity the poor.

(Proverbs xxviii. 8.)

An unjust man is an abomination to the just, and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.

(Proverbs xxix. 27.)

Protests were not long ago made to the Hendon Borough Council's Public Libraries Committee against the circulation of a book of poems by Mr. Rex Warner, a young schoolmaster, son of a Church of England clergyman. The book was one of those recommended

for general reading by Hendon library authorities. The protest was on the grounds that one of the poems in the book, entitled *Hymn*, was 'a gushing welcome to a coming revolution'. A better ground of complaint would have been that it was blasphemously shabby writing. (As Mr. Warner shows in a recent novel, he can write slickly when not chumming down to the Workers.)

No more shall men take pride in paper and gold,  
in furs in cars in servants in spoons and knives. . . .

Come away then  
you fat man.

You don't want your watch chain.

But don't interfere with us, because we know you too well.

If you do that you will lose your top hat

and be knocked on the head until you are dead.

Come with us if you can, and, if not, go to hell

with your comfy chairs, your talk about the police,

your doll wife, your cowardly life, your newspaper, your  
interests in the East,

you, there, who are so patriotic, you liar, you beast ! . . .

There is no need now to bribe and to take the bribe.

The king is flying, his regiments have melted like ice in the  
spring.

Light has been let in. The fences are down. No broker is  
left alive. . . .

Now you can join us, now all together sing All Power.

not to-morrow but now in this hour, All Power

to Lovers of Life, to Workers, to the Hammer, the Sickle,  
the Blood.

Let us examine *The Conflict*, by Day Lewis, which is generally regarded as a successful Left poem.<sup>1</sup>

I sang as one

Who on a tilting deck sings

To keep their courage up, though the wave hangs

That shall cut off their sun.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Time To Dance*, Hogarth Press, 1935.

As storm-cocks sing,  
Flinging their natural answer in the wind's teeth,  
And care not if it is waste of breath  
Or birth-carol of spring.

As ocean-flyer clings  
To height, to the last drop of spirit driving on  
While yet ahead is land to be won  
And work for wings.

Each of the first three verses illustrates conflict with opposing forces in a different emotional context. In the first verse the poet uses the singing sailor metaphor to typify defiance in the face of almost certain spiritual defeat. In the second verse he uses the metaphor of the storm-cock to typify windy spiritual haranguing which relieves feelings although its effect is uncertain. In the third verse he uses the metaphor of the ocean-flyer to typify reckless soaring towards ends not yet visible from the airy vantage of poetical ecstasy. So far the poet has been in conflict with the poet knows not what, has fought no real battles. He has not, in fact, been a poet but merely one of 'their' (the missing antecedents') voices, uncertain of literary success; then he became storm-cocksure in his manner; then presumably he stopped singing and started clinging—to the hope that Something Wonderful would happen to him in spite of the cloudy outlook. High above the clouds he begins singing again—to himself this time.

Singing I was at peace,  
Above the clouds, outside the ring,  
For sorrow finds a swift release in song  
And pride its poise.

Yet living here,  
As one between two massing powers I live  
Whom neutrality cannot save  
Nor occupation cheer.

He is 'outside the ring': this does not mean anything yet, but it is going to mean the political ring. He is sorry for himself because he has had no literary success and his pride is wounded, but he consoles himself with the feeling of superiority in the isolation of being his own audience. Now, looking back on this period, he sees that it was the isolation of belonging to no political party; he would now scornfully label some one else in the same position a 'neutral', although he did not know he was one at the time, nor did he know then that there was no pleasure in life for the man who chose poetry as a career.

None such shall be left alive :  
The innocent wing is soon shot down,  
And private stars fade in the blood-red dawn  
Where two worlds strive.

The red advance of life  
Contracts pride, calls out the common blood,  
Beats song into a single blade,  
Makes a depth-charge of grief.

Move then with new desires,  
For where we used to build and love  
Is no man's land, and only ghosts can live  
Between two fires.

He was lucky in coming down to political earth when he did, in losing his poetic innocence, for all those who stay up in poetry are going to be shot down, and that soon—before the two worlds strive they will take shots at the neutrals first. The ex-poet is steadily losing his pride. He has no weapons because he did not set out in life with the idea of fighting; so he knocks his early work into political shape. 'Makes a depth-charge of grief': he discharges his self-pity, caused by literary neglect, upon the whole capitalist regime. He need no

longer feel that his failure was his own fault : there can be no real interest in poetry on the part of either poets or readers until the class war has been fought. Meanwhile, everything that is not either Left politics or Right politics belongs to No Man's Land, and if you venture out into it you will be dragged back to the ranks and shot for being a Poet.

Day Lewis's poem is a threat passed on to others by one who has himself been bullied into Left politics. The poem is, as it were, a last poem by some one about to turn militant Left ; and that should logically be the end of him as a poet. But, the sacrifice of the poet to political exigency must be repeated, because it is important to have some one constantly on the point of being converted—he may bring others with him. That should be the end of them as poem-readers. They are now equipped to bully poets into writing bullying battle-cries. Actually, there need never be a battle—victory can be declared when everybody is bullying everybody else into being a Communist and there are no new converts to make, only old ones.

## *Standards of Art*

IN 1934-5 MR. F. D. KLINGENDER, a reputable British Marxist intellectual, conducted a series of twelve 'discussion lectures' on painting for the benefit of the recently formed Left Artists' International. Mr. Klingender, I believe, is not an artist himself, so that his claim to a hearing from the artists was that of the 'art critic'—except that, as a Marxist, he enjoys the additional advantage of knowing what art really is, and what interests art really ought to serve. In an essay on the subject of the lectures, *Introductory Notes*,<sup>1</sup> he made the following generalizations :

Art is a form of social consciousness (p. 26). . . . Art, however, is more than a mere reflection of social reality. It is at the same time, and even primarily, a revolutionary agent for the transformation of that reality. Untrammelled by the rigid fetters of transcendental dogma, without, on the other hand, having to resort to the lengthy processes of logical deduction and experimental verification, art is the most spontaneous form of social consciousness (pp. 27-8).

This provides us, at least, with evidence upon which to construct the Left notion of the artist. His every picture must tell a story—and, preferably, a story with a good Marxist moral oozing from it. If the story is sordid enough, it makes a good Communist picture—proves the sordidness of Capitalism. (If the picture presents happy instances of life under Communism, it is only a poster.) Yet the artist's consciousness is not to be

<sup>1</sup> Printed in a pamphlet, *5 on Revolutionary Art*, Wishart, 1935.

burdened with the lengthy processes of Marxist logic, nor is an explicit 'literary' response required of the observer of the artist's picture. The steps from glaring-social-injustice to artist's-awareness-of-it to pictorial-representation - of - Socialist - moral to the observer's-acceptance-of-the-moral, followed by the observer's-political-action, must be a process of instantaneous transmission, with no pauses for thinking. Artists are proverbially averse from thinking : here, at last, are critics who understand them so well that they command them not to think, knowing how sweet will be the obedience thereof. Similarly with the ordinary observer of pictures, who only knows what he likes, but doesn't know what he dislikes : his problem, too, is simplified—he is given something to dislike in the Communist picture and can at last feel knowledgeable about art.

Painting thus helps to send up the political temperature. The public is bombarded not only with political arguments, but also with political sights. As any serious art critic will tell you, a painter is an eye, not a mind, so he cannot be said to be prostituting art in painting one kind of subject rather than another. If there is any prostitution involved, it goes on in the mind of the Communist Thinker, the mind behind the eye ; and if you accuse him of immorality, he will soon make you feel a sinner for not being a Communist.

The Communist painter is therefore the painter plus Communist dogma ; and, for his picture to be intelligible, the observer must be an observing eye plus dogma. The pictures do not themselves contain dogma—they are 'impersonal' : the dogma is only subtly, dumbly, indicated. When the dogma is stale because the occasion for it has vanished, the picture is also stale. After all, it seems, the painter must be something more than an eye : a mind which works visually, a mind



using itself as an eye. If he is not to be merely the dogmatist's automaton, he must define things in terms of their external form: have a language of his own—the language of visual significance. In the Communist picture there is no language—there is only the politician's language outside the picture. And so the picture lasts no longer than the political vehemence that inspired it.

This is not to say that the painter is to be preoccupied with 'pure form', which Mr. Klingender looks upon, by the way, as the last expression of bourgeois decadence in art. A painter preoccupied purely with form—with form alone—is violating his subject, making it as meaningless as possible. A painter's function is to define visual meanings, which he can only do by establishing relation between things in terms of their appearance. Poets treat of more complex relations than visual ones. But the simplicity of visual meaning cannot be arrived at by reducing literary meaning to social meaning: social meaning is not visual meaning, and 'pure form' is closer in its meaninglessness to the properties of art in not laying upon it a burden of extraneous meaning.

Perhaps Mr. Klingender would assert—and we would agree with him—that painters are born into the world as speaking creatures before they turn to painting; they are equipped of necessity with various levels of 'literary' understanding of the very world they are to make pictures of. But a good painter uses his literary culture to help him distinguish the better between literary and visual significance: a good painter is the better for being educated. Painters are right in being anti-literary in the sense of guarding strictly against the intrusion of literary significance into their pictures, and against attempts to interpret them in literary terms. But we frequently find painters to-day using politics as an anti-literary weapon—which makes them oppose social definition to

literary definition and shirk their function of visual definition. There is no necessary opposition between visual definition and literary definition, or social definition and literary definition, or visual definition and social definition. Opposition only arises when the functions of one process are falsely confused with those of another.

In looking at a picture, as well as in making one, any and every 'literary' criterion is inept. The syntax of a picture—what makes it seem an eloquent assemblage of things—is derived from the visual universe; yet, if in looking at a picture we must exclude all but visual considerations, social considerations must be even more severely excluded than literary ones because they are more vulgarly persistent.

Left writers as well as Capitalists tend to lump poets and painters and musicians together as 'artists'; it is the painters who suffer the greatest misunderstanding as a result of this. Stephen Spender, Gorki (or his translator), Mrs. Woolf—they all do it. Mr. Herbert Read is another offender :

And by art, of course, I mean not only the plastic arts which have been my main consideration in this chapter, but with them the arts of poetry, music and dance (*Art and Society*, Heinemann, 1937).

The 'offence' here consists in the encouragement of confusion about the difference between the kind of consciousness natural on the one hand, to painters and, on the other, to poets. Or is there no difference—are they both essentially political, as the Left assumes? Mrs. Woolf, it will be remembered, assumed it easy and right for the poet to turn politician precisely because he dealt with words rather than with the more primitive medium of paint. And, of course, if the poet is an 'artist', the other artists—painters, sculptors

and musicians—must, Q.E.D., turn political too. Yet if politics are not the special responsibility of writers, it is even more irrelevant to demand that the artistic consciousness should burden itself with political rationalization.

Mr. Read, who, to do him justice, opposes propaganda in painting (though apparently not in writing), champions the artists of 'pure form' as the true revolutionary artists ('represented by painters like Mondrian, Héliou, Ben Nicholson, Moholy-Nagy; and by sculptors like Brancusi, Gabo and Barbara Hepworth'<sup>1</sup>). One merit of these artists, Mr. Read tells us, is that they have been able to maintain an attitude of detachment in the politicized atmosphere of to-day.<sup>2</sup> He says of them: 'I can only see one logical exception [to the Marxist rule of thumb]—the artist who can so deprive his work of temporary and accidental qualities that what he achieves is in effect *pure form*. . . . Having no sympathy with any existing ideology, they attempt to escape into a world without ideologies.' But the painter's world is not one of ideologies, so why should he 'escape' from them? Mr. Read's favourite painters are, in fact, those who escape from all responsibilities of meaning, including their proper responsibility of visual meaning: therefore they are 'revolutionaries'. They are safe from capture by the non-Lefts and from the temptation to create bad art, which they would do if they painted as Lefts—and also from the accusation of being bourgeois, if they are

<sup>1</sup> 5 on *Revolutionary Art*, Wishart, 1935.

<sup>2</sup> The probability is that most of these have maintained 'an attitude of detachment' for the usual artistic reason that they are 'too busy', or don't understand public affairs clearly enough to be able to contribute anything. A few of the artists named by Mr. Read have, at least, been seen marching under Left protest-banners: the Left version of public affairs having on these occasions been adequately simple for them.

sufficiently destructive of traditional artistic standards. If, that is to say, you are one of the 'abstract' artists your value is not of this vulgar politicized world: (the italics are Mr. Read's) 'They shut themselves up within the Ivory Tower, and it is just possible that, *for the time being* (the very special time in which we live) their tactics may be of some advantage to the art of the future'. All that they are doing is to hold on to their paint and paint-brushes and canvases—upon which they have not painted any pictures. The only alternative to painting politics seems to be that of not really painting.

Actually, the painter's answer to the politics challenge is an easier one than the writer's. The writer's true stand is *beyond politics*; he must make the effort of keeping far outside the political range of interests, so as to see political problems in their true perspective. The painter is in the lucky position of being obliged to ignore political problems so far as his work is concerned: his problems remain what they have always been—purely visual ones. The poet must be able to make the answer that the political aspects of life have already entered into the structure of his thought; but the painter need only say that political problems do not enter into the problems of painting. Mr. Read obviously envies the painter's role of innocence—and one can sympathize with him. The painter is not, like Mr. Read, called in to introduce readings of the works of Left poets or justify Left literature to literature.

Mr. Read describes the painter's consciousness in Freudian jargon. More mysteries! The difference between his view and the Marxist one seems to be that, whereas he thinks the most important part of the painter's mind is subconscious, the Marxist thinks it is class-conscious—that the painter's eye consciously seeks the guidance of the Communist Thinker.

He says :

For obviously the work of art has correspondence with each region of the mind. *It derives its energy, its irrationality and its mysterious power from the id, which is to be regarded as the source of what we usually call inspiration. It is given formal synthesis and unity by the ego ; and finally it may be assimilated to those ideologies or spiritual aspirations which are the peculiar creation of the super-ego.*

The light which this hypothesis of Freud's throws upon the whole history and development of art, in the race and in the individual, is so revealing for me personally it constitutes the strongest evidence for the general validity of the theory of psycho-analysis (*Art and Society*, Heinemann, 1937).

The advantage of Mr. Read's view for Mr. Read is that it enables him to shove the painter out of reach of Marxism : he seems confident that no orthodox Marxist would want to make use of faculties which were such a shambles. Mr. Read, it is clear, feels that he personally may not survive, but he has a wistful hope that painters will, if no one else. But he had best warn them to beware of those mysterious ' ideologies or spiritual aspirations which are the peculiar creation ' of Mr. Read, and which Mr. Read is going to hold them to, should he chance to survive the Communist deluge.

Mr. Eric Gill says, ' All art is propaganda '—in the true crusading manner. ' The paintings and sculptures and architectural designs exhibited at the Royal Academy every year express the values of the dominant class ' (because they are ' propaganda for studio values '). ' Therefore they are propaganda for the successful bourgeois ', and ' no decent Catholic painter could paint a picture whose effect was to add another buttress to the bourgeois '—that is, in support of ' the founders of the modern world, in which all things are merchandise, money is the ruling power and all things are made for the profit of investors '. The point seems to be that your

pictures are bad if they express the values of the dominant class, but good if they express the values of a class which wants to steal the domination—so long as it doesn't succeed in stealing it. For surely as soon as the Communists are in possession of the Royal Academy, Mr. Gill will remember that (in spite of his numerous erotic nudes) he was really a Roman Catholic all the time. Let us hope that when at last His Holiness is in possession of the Royal Academy, Mr. Gill will remember that he was really supposed to be a painter all the time and will then say : ' All art is propaganda for art '.

Mr. Gill is refusing to be a buttress to the bourgeois because he wants to be a buttress to Catholicism : it is in this sense that he is a Communist—for the period of revolution during which the bourgeois are being dethroned and before Catholicism takes over. As a matter of fact, ' no decent Catholic painter ' of the Renaissance felt that he was adding a buttress to the Church—painting and architecture were sturdy crafts in their own right, and there was no mixing of metaphors. The painter thought of himself first and foremost as a craftsman, and accepted commissions from any patron who could pay for his work—from Pope or Prince down to the small convent or merchant guild. Even so devout a monk as Fra Angelico was not above painting the portraits of wealthy Florentines. Vasari, in *Lives of the Painters* (1564), says of Giotto that he was ' no less good as Christian than he was excellent as painter '. But of Pietro Perugino : ' He was a man of very little religion, and he could never be made to believe in the immortality of the soul '. Yet Perugino was no less good a Christian painter. The trouble with the Catholic painter to-day is that his subject is technically worn-out—the pictorial possibilities of the Christian myth have been exhausted by the good work of the past—and so his work can only

be valuable as 'propaganda for Catholicism'. The works of the early masters are generally held to be pictorially and not evangelically stimulating to-day, which proves that the painters were concerned with the religious precept only in so far as it had pictorial implications.

Communism offers the painter a new myth which is poor in pictorial possibilities compared with the Christian one—the story stuff is a shadow-play of argumentative rhetoric. The Communist patron is too ruthlessly evangelical to provide the painter with a real subject. A hundred years ago he would have been content with battle scenes by Delacroix: and even fifty years ago Anton von Werner would have been good enough for Red Army paintings. Now that the Communist has become more aggressive, he wants not mere pictorial competence, but genius, for his painting of Third International celebrations; he rejects the mediocre talent officially held adequate for Coronation processions, etc. And there is some excuse from his point of view for being suspicious of Fra Eric's political intentions.

The non-professing painter who allows himself to be commissioned by the Communist patron will clearly need to have his wits about him. Vasari tells of a tip given by Buonamico Buffalmacco, 'in his waggish way', to a fellow-painter who could not get enough liveliness into his work. Buonamico suggested that he should paint some words issuing from the mouths of his figures. If the painter doing commissions for the Communists feels that he is not getting enough political vitality into his pictures, he can add a balloon here and there, and fill it with slogans from the *Daily Worker*.

## *Standards of Political Writing*

HOW DOES POLITICAL WRITING differ from a novel, from a poem, from scientific writing ?

If you were describing a situation involving a group of people and you wanted your description to be a poem, you would write about them from a universal point of view ; if you wanted to write a novel about them, you would describe them from their own point of view, identifying yourself as the writer with their setting. If you wrote about them from your own point of view, the result would be autobiography—your description would be of their peculiarities in terms of your own. A scientific account of them would be impersonal, as if neither you nor they existed as persons—as it were from the point of view of their teeth or their internal organs. Properly, a political description of people would be written from the point of view of the damage they inflicted on one another or avoided inflicting. Each variety of description has its particular and appropriate motive. A political novel, however, exhibits a confusion of motive, for in it the writer attempts to describe people from their own point of view and also from the point of view of social damage—and even to characterize the social damage that his potential readers inflict and suffer. This means that he must superimpose political values upon the special moral values which, as a novelist, he takes upon himself to illuminate.

A scientific account of people might include a descrip-



tion of the factual basis of their life, such as anthropology gives of primitive people ; a novel about primitive people would necessarily avail itself of anthropological facts. Anthropology is half science and half novel-writing, because in describing people from the point of view of their physical setting and habits one cannot help describing them somewhat from their own point of view. Novels about civilized people would be good anthropology if civilized people suddenly forgot all about themselves. The difference between novel-writing and the literature of all sciences except anthropology is the difference between imagination, in which the author identifies himself with his subject, and factual reconstruction. Since one cannot identify oneself with a scientific subject, which is seen as an absolutely strange phenomenon, science gives the effect of being written from nowhere at all ; but the novelist's self-obliteration removes him to the human scene he is describing. Ornithology, for example, is a detached view of birds, from the point of view of their physical habits. A novel about birds would have to tell of them from a bird's point of view. Since birds take no self-conscious view of themselves, what really happens in bird and animal stories is that the writer adopts a sort of bird's eye view of human relations and makes an equivalence between the animal habits of reproduction and engagement in and relaxation from the struggle for existence, and the personal habits of human beings. A novel about the class struggle imposes a sort of Teddy Tail restriction on the novelist. Like all animal novels, Left novels are spurious both as human and animal documents. They offer an account of the animal wrongs that people suffer from one another, and might just as well be offered to little birds, with the object of persuading them to get rid of cuckoos, for all the sense they make as novels.

The political novelist has a motive exterior to that of novel-writing ; his relation with his readers cannot be impersonal as is the novelist's, nor yet detached as is the scientist's. His political motive is his real motive ; he uses the novel-form to win devotion to his theme—novels are addressed to the human affections. But he asks sympathy on the single score of class wrongs. His object is to stimulate resentment in his readers, not to engage all their human sympathies to the end of enriching their consciousness about other people. The effect of the Left novel is to cause irritation, and only irritable people read Left novels with any enjoyment. The reader does not enter into the novel's world and depart the wiser in life when the book ends : the Left novel is merely an incident in the perpetual drama of irritation on which Left behaviour nourishes itself. Left writing aims at producing behaviour and not reading-enjoyment, and is better Left writing the more it irritates—the values of the Left writer are nuisance values.

But not all political writing has the purpose of irritation. Seventeenth-century political writing is free of this taint, which results from a disingenuous mixing of motives. A legitimate object of political writing proper is to make impersonal studies of existing laws in relation to existing circumstances. Thus it has the function both of defending the laws and of recommending particular changes. Hooker's polemics, for example, are dignified reading. As a conservative polemist defending Elizabethan church polity against the Puritans, his argument suffers from the vagueness of its religious speculations, but otherwise his language is plain and restrained. Hooker wrote with the patience of retirement, having given up his post as Master of the Temple in 1585 in order to write his treatise ; the finished work is a responsible clarification of the problems of an age—

problems which needed the settlement of definition rather than of action. And because Hooker's subject is always larger than any particular wrong urged by the inheritors of Wyclif, the wrongs are dealt with temperately, incidentally, in the course of his examination. In his preface Hooker disclaims the intention of argumentative bias :

Think not that ye read the words of one that bendeth himself as an adversary against the truth which ye have already embraced, but the words of one who desireth even to embrace together with you the self-same truth, if it be truth, and for that cause (for no other, God he knoweth) hath undertaken the burdensome labour of this painful kind of conference (*Ecclesiastical Polity*, 1591).

In Hooker the sought solution does not lie outside the scope of the writing itself, as it does in contemporary Left argument ; and so there is no residual effect of irritation, even if one cannot agree with him—as few people could to-day. Hooker is always careful to define his terms ; his terms, that is, are always as clear as the experimental nature of philosophical definition and argument allows them to be. The Left draws at random on language and the emotions to inflate the size of intrinsically trivial incident, and a great deal of physical energy is spent in insisting on the importance of the political subject over other subjects. Never before have politicians been so arrogant as to demand that the political subject take precedence over all others. For Hooker the political subject was no more than one element, and a subordinate one, in the whole religious scheme of life.

As an example of seventeenth-century polemic which is less conservative in tone than Hooker's we may cite two of Milton's pamphlets : *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, maintaining the right of nations to depose

a tyrant, and *Areopagitica*, an appeal to Parliament, and particularly to the presbyterian majority (1644), to grant freedom for unlicensed printing. In the first, Milton examines the false political use made of scripture with regard to the inviolability of the king's person to justify the *fait accompli* to scriptural and classical scholarship, and exposes those who evade the responsibility of getting rid of the king. Milton's argument, in so far as it is addressed to an audience wider than that represented by the government itself, including more than the politically interested persons, is moral rather than political in tone. Milton's style is always tempered with the conviction that a political issue rests upon a graver, moral issue. Left polemics have the destructive temper of interference, because their aim is to disturb moral equanimity by 'logical' appeals to the material conscience. In Milton political moderation is the result of a high moral intensity; his tone is grave-tempered even in disagreement because he does not attempt to stake all values on political agreement.

For this is not the liberty we can hope, that no grievance ever should arise in the Commonwealth, that let no man in this world expect; but when complaints are freely heard, deeply consider'd, and speedily reform'd, then is the utmost bound of civill liberty attain'd, that wise men look for.

(*Areopagitica*.)

We may think Milton's morality harsh and rigid, and his politics meanly moderate; but he is not foolish, dangerous, volatile—and, above all, he is literally concerned with problems of administration. Left writing has no tradition of thoughtfulness in the use of language, and so inspires no confidence in a practical solution of administrative problems by Left means. The political subject is publicized in Left treatment, but not

analysed in any way that indicates a sober administrative intention or capacity.

In the early eighteenth century satire was used to combine literary and political elements, but in such a way that neither the literary nor the political element was offered in absolute literary or political seriousness. Defoe uses the method, in *A Short Way with the Dissenters*, to force anti-toleration arguments to an absurd conclusion; and Swift in the *Drapier Letters* to obstruct Tory fiscal policy in Ireland. But *A Short Way with the Dissenters* does not pretend to compete with *Moll Flanders*. Swift did not wish to pass for anything better, as a literary man, than a satirist—his serious side he turned to religion, though even here he could not resist the temptation to satire, as in his *Tale of a Tub*. Pope had a contempt of literature, which enabled him to offer his satires as literature.

The *Drapier Letters* introduced a new factor into political writing, for they were addressed primarily to a wide political audience in Ireland, with the object of provoking action. So long as the political writer addresses those associated with him in the task of administration, together with a relatively small class of clerics, lawyers, and educated persons, his aim is that of influencing government policy directly. But, as the political public grows, his aim comes to be that of educating opinion as a means of influencing policy indirectly—the public intervenes between political criticism and the desired administrative end, requiring placation. This trick of defeating potential opposition by creating potential support, as an intermediate step to political results, concentrates more and more attention upon wrongs as a basis for political appeal; political statement becomes strategical rather than practical.

Thomas Paine is an interesting early example of the

growth of tendentiousness in political literature. Having served his apprenticeship during the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, he persuaded himself that the unenfranchised British scene was a barbaric one—and behaved and wrote as if he had been personally insulted. The *Rights of Man* was written in reply to Burke's criticisms of the French Revolution. Burke had argued that in 1688 Parliament, in the name of the English nation, declared its allegiance to a monarchy 'for ever'. Instead of taking Tory anxiety into consideration (Tory feelings were still tender from having bungled the American situation), Paine made it the opportunity for further tendentious attack, thus obscuring and damaging his real case—the alleged merits of the constitutional changes in France: Paine's language in dealing with Burke's pompous and ill-informed judgements on them was dishonestly moralistic, making him seem a monster rather than a prater.

I am not contending for nor against any form of government, nor for nor against any party, here or elsewhere. That which a whole nation chooses to do it has a right to do. Mr. Burke says, No. Where, then, does the right exist? I am contending for the rights of the *living*, and against their being willed away and controuled and contracted for by the manuscript assumed authority of the dead, and Mr. Burke is contending for the authority of the dead over the rights and freedom of the living. There was a time when kings disposed of their crowns by will upon their death-beds, and consigned the people, like beasts of the field, to whatever successor they appointed. This is now so exploded as scarcely to be remembered, and so monstrous as hardly to be believed. But the Parliamentary clauses upon which Mr. Burke builds his political church are of the same nature (*Rights of Man*, part i., 1791).

Paine's method anticipates what has come to be

habitual in Left procedure—the method of talking in a moralistic language when one's meanings are narrowly political.

In Hooker's or Milton's writing political issues are referred to an internal, moral standard of values: the appeal is not exclusively political. Paine is constantly urging 'principles' by which to judge events; but they are political principles, and abstract in the sense of being external to the moral aspects of the given situation. Democratic principles assume that all men are the moral peers of Man, a political abstraction with certain idealized Rights. The professional democrat deals neither with the special human situation nor with moral values, and so his political language is a jargon that ceases to have meaning when it has served its function as propaganda.

Democratic principles were crossed with economic ones in the nineteenth century; and to-day contemporary political writing abounds in the jargon of economics. The economic panacea is even offered as a popular faith, without any political tags—for example, as with the Douglas Credit panacea. Marxist propaganda rests upon economic principles by which the Marxist economist gives the most cynical possible interpretation to production, money, and consumption statistics; the Marxist political creed consists of two alternate propagandist purposes—that of persuading its audience that Marxist economic theory is true, and that of persuading that Marxist political organization would eliminate the evils identified with the statistics—which are stressed, meanwhile, as a necessary consequence of the capitalist economic system. Politics which have the aim, not of correcting social discrepancies, but of persuading us that they would not occur in a society based exclusively on economic realities, are in

danger of becoming a theoretical luxury, and an indulgence to the politician which he has no right to ask. And because Left polemics are such an indulgence, and not morally impelled, they need literary aids to make them seem more serious than they are.

People concerned with administrative problems do not need to talk in terms of democratic or economic principles, or to resort to literature for eloquence. Serious political activity is not an attack on opinion, but a study of the relation between the moral principles which have the consent of every one and the practical civic situation in which conflicting demands seem to contradict the general moral agreement. A sincere politician, that is, must always be ready to effect compromise—not moral but political compromise.

The uncompromising tone characteristic of Left polemics is sometimes accompanied with a brutal delight in the existence of wrongs. The Left is interested in demonstrating that the wrongs of Capitalism overwhelmingly outnumber its good aspects. Allen Hutt's *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain*<sup>1</sup> is almost diabolical in tone because of his enthusiastic dilation upon the material wrongs suffered by the workers. Historical evils, which could only have been put right at the time, are strung into a gigantic inheritance of injustice which apparently the author, though not a worker himself, feels far more acutely than any real worker. The Communist would reply that the average worker is ignorant; but he is at least as well-informed about the conditions in which he lives as the 'bourgeois' writer is who derives his emotions from statistics. The bulk of Left writing is done *for* but not *by* the working-class, on the ground of 'ideological sympathy', which means morbid excitement in the contemplation of material

<sup>1</sup> Martin Lawrence, 1933.



wrongs. Too great an interest in the material wrongs people suffer is evil. It breeds the belief that life is made up of wrongs to the exclusion of the good things. It corrupts rather than strengthens the sympathies which must spring from an active recognition of the good.

There is a kind of history-writing not avowedly Communist but which nevertheless exhibits all the characteristics of Left writing. *England since the Industrial Revolution*, a history by Mr. J. Hampden Jackson, published recently by Messrs. Gollancz, is conventionally Left in its tendentiousness. In his preface the author says : ' This book is intended for people knowing little or nothing of English history who want to find out something of the causes of present discontents.' But who wants history to illumine present discontents ? Left history is all pseudo-contemporary ; it divides history into discontents and their causes, suppressing fortunate events—because the causes of these must be in Communism, which has not yet come. In this particular book writers and poets are quoted as references for descriptions of discontents, and are complimented if they indicate the Capitalist causes. Music, painting, architecture are viewed as upper-class methods of forgetting the wrongs inflicted. People who seem to be having fun are damned in the eyes of the Left, especially if the fun can be described as Capitalist fun. The following passage from Mr. Jackson's book is typical of Left lack of imaginative sympathy :

One sometimes hears it said that the Early Victorian Age was an age of tranquillity. The very opposite is the truth. It was an age like our own of turmoil, an age of booms and slumps, of profiteering and bankruptcy, of plenty and poverty. It was an age like our own of triumph in engineering, an age when the face of England was being transformed by a network of railroads as suddenly and disconcertingly

as in our own times it has been transformed by a network of motor roads. And like our own it was an age of uncertainty, an age of disagreement on the greatest questions of all (p. 78).

'All history,' said Karl Marx, 'is the history of class struggles.' Mr. Jackson wants to prove that all ages were as discontented as ours; the only way we can make a historical difference between our own and preceding ages is to engage in more political activity. The assumption is that more political activity will make us more contented. But more and more political activity means more and more discontent—hence the necessity of causing discontent by political irritants. Nothing would so much annoy the Left politician as the contentment which it is his professed object to achieve.

The irritation caused by Left writing is entirely due to the Left treatment of the political subject—is always an emotion apart from the actual pain suffered in enduring the particular wrong. The Left protest is not so much against wrong as against the very habit of contentment; and restless and uncertain people enjoy Left literature because it dignifies their irritability by deriving it from humanitarian interest.

Mr. G. D. H. Cole in *Politics and Literature*, published in 1929, draws attention to the fate of most political writing; he says that political writing has the best chance of surviving if 'it charges great and simple causes with the highest emotional and intellectual content and expresses them in the most fitting and most beautiful language', or if 'it is highly seasoned with its author's personality'. The writer, that is, must draw on all literary sources at his disposal to prove that the political cause is the greatest and simplest literary theme: the effective political writer must have a good literary education—and also, it seems, inject generous doses of personal charm into his writing, while literature is to be

regarded as a finishing school for the politician. He says further : ' Much propagandist literature is very bad writing ; but so is much love poetry, and a whole cartload of new novels a week '. But bad poems and bad novels are bad because they are bad literature ; while bad political writing is bad politics too.

*SECTION THREE*

ANALYSIS OF THE LEFT HUMAN BEING



*Left Life*

LECTURING at a Women's Training College not long ago, Mr. Ramsay Muir said that he thought it was unnatural to hear so many people say, often with an air of satisfaction, 'I take no interest in politics'. By taking an interest in politics the ordinary person means taking an interest in national and world events—being well informed about them. By taking an interest in politics the Left-minded person means taking sides, even joining a party. Mr. Muir was speaking from a Liberal-Left point of view on this occasion, and went so far as to say: 'I am not sure that any teacher who says he or she is not interested in politics ought not to be kicked out of the profession'.

The Conservative in politics makes allowance for those who take interest but no active part in political affairs, as well as for those who take very little interest. He would think it desirable that every one should take some interest, as part of a humane attitude to life, but he would not assume that an interest in topical politics must always be identified with a party interest, or that it necessarily involved participation. He would allow for a good deal of off-record personal opinion about current events—as unnecessary, if not impossible, to assess in party terms at all. In Conservative life politics form one activity, or interest, in a varied range of others. No Conservative would demand that his other activities and interests should yield political emotions, or that they should be inspired by political zeal. The

Conservative makes separate allowance for religion, the theatre, music, games, love. There is no such thing, for example, as a Conservative novel : there is no all-embracing Conservative ideology in terms of which it would be possible to define all the elements of life. But in Left life you state everything in political terms ; all your activities and interests are subject to the political stress.

Experience which does not yield naturally to the Left stress has to be 'interpreted' before it can be made intelligible to the Left-minded person. Religion, for example, is a philosophy of experience for which the Left person has no use—but, given interpretative treatment, it becomes significant as a Left bugbear. Religious practice is construed in terms of the Left political argument as an adjunct of capitalist or imperialist economic policy. Left anti-religious propaganda, and the anti-religious museums in Russia, attack the evils of Church land-ownership and point to the colonizing influences of missionary work. The Left accuses the imperialists, in fact, of a sort of religious spell-binding as a prelude to economic impositions—where Left tactics would be limited to political spell-binding. Neither the religious person, nor the non-political critic of religion—and not all Conservatives are orthodox Christians—would recognize the appeal of religion in these terms. But the Left does not mind this in the least—all the more to argue about !

The technique of attaining the Left position is one of simplification : no more meaning can be admitted into any subject than the basic Marxist economic interpretation allows for. The Left thinker, indeed, makes no complete definitions of life except in its economic aspects—he will not admit that anything more complicated exists than economic problems. And so, in

considering Left life, the question 'What does it leave out?' yields a more illuminating answer than the question 'What does it include?'

The Conservative would not define life itself as a political entity: it would probably not occur to him to give a single inclusive definition of life. He would give a summary of what life contained for him—describe it loosely in terms of occupations, pleasures, friends, and so on. No Conservative would say, 'our life is the fight between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat';<sup>1</sup> it is the Left person who equates living with political struggle. It is very much as if the Left were engaging in a fight with non-combatants: Alick West's warlike utterances are a subjective rather than a literal description of what goes on in Left life. A great deal goes on, clearly, in an ideological vacuum—is not real life at all, but a private drama of struggle between the Left conscience and the instinct to live like a Conservative.

The Left programme of life rules out anything complicated. What does the Left regard as complex? Only what he regards as bad—like adult psychology or industrial crises: these must be replaced by Left simplicity of the heavy hand. Karl Marx asserts that the Belgian statistician Quételet rendered a great service by demonstrating how 'even the apparent accidents of social life possess, in their periodic recurrence and their periodic averages, an inner necessity'.<sup>2</sup> All the trivial incidents of daily life have an inner economic determinism of their own: therefore they can have no private meaning for you, nor can you expect to exercise personal control over them. If you tried to define them personally, you would be creating a complex self—and that would be increasing the content of life. All

<sup>1</sup> Alick West in the *Daily Worker*.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters to Kugelmann*, 3rd March 1869.



experience beyond the socially significant is by Left standards potentially corrupting. The daily social incidents themselves are really political omens sent to warn you against personal playing with life—any personal shaping of life is, of course, regarded as play. Characteristically, it is of light-hearted experience that the Left is most suspicious. Pleasure, the gentle exercise of taste and humour, has an unimportant place in Left life : it is the most difficult to define politically. Poetry seems less of an enemy—journalistic simplifications can be made of it for subsidiary political purposes. The corpus of philosophical speculation is the most easily dismissed—by making Communism supersede all philosophies in its superior simplicity. 'Of the former philosophies there remain "the science of thinking and its laws—formal logic and dialectics".' (Lenin quoting Marx.)

The result of this process of simplification is not unlike what you see in Germany and other Fascist countries. The Left method is to eliminate complexity as disorderly, whereas the Fascist method is to make an official complex of national peculiarities and so cultivate feelings of sufficiency and expanded importance. German Fascism, for example, eliminates modern art, arguing that it suppresses the native complexities of the German temperament. An illusion of vital richness is acquired by filling up the large canvas of existence with the physical features of the German nation. The Communist makes use of modern art developments by grafting upon them a political purpose—and finding a sympathy between experimental art technique and Left political technique. It is reported that Armenian painters have been warned recently to cease painting only landscapes and devote themselves to 'illustrating heroic Soviet life, capturing for portrayal the charming

personalities of leaders of Socialist construction'. The implication is that they were not being modern enough either in their technique or in their politics. In Germany, landscapes of the fatherland are warmly approved, as giving evidence of the richness of the nation's physical properties.

In the later stages of Left statecraft the political theme itself is eliminated as too complex, is replaced by a simple fervour of economics. The political elements in 'Soviet construction' tend to be absorbed in the more elementary economic motive. The atmosphere of political fervour in Soviet Russia to-day is sustained chiefly by the existence of a hostile world and those untiring international promoters of argument, the Trotskyists. One might say that in the rest of the world the Communists were struggling to rid themselves of the complexities of capitalist political thought. Even democracy, a capitalist invention, is not simple enough; the levelling it accomplishes still leaves much private difference, much complexity.

As with modern developments in art, so with modern developments in the attitude toward women. Fascists expand the physical importance of women—sexually and domestically, while eliminating any other importance. The Communists restrict the importance and meaning of women to that of the ordinary male citizen—child-bearing being regarded as an incidental citizen function. Women are granted the same pay as men for the same work, and allowances are made for their work as child-bearers. The Communist attitude gives women more economic freedom, but allows them only economic reality. The superimposed 'cultural' aim of Fascism introduces a mystical element into its physical view of women: they are potential producers of grandiose population-material for the nation.

The Fascist structure has simplicity in being exclusive. But its simplicity is only the first stage. Then comes aggrandizement from within ; then, ideally, the lavish spreading of the national content to new national borders. Communism embraces more factors, and relies on economic simplification to make a world of international ordinariness.

The Fascist pattern of life is only meant to be applied nationally ; it leaves room for other national patterns—depends upon their existence to set off its own inflated nationalism. Communism is not supposed to be restricted to national patterns : racial differences must be interpreted as differences in the stage of economic development reached. The Jews, who, as a race, reached economic maturity before Communists were thought of, are only interesting to Communists as they are persecuted by Fascists. Under Communism the Jew is reduced to an elementary economic being like every one else. The Communist rule of thumb is expressed in the slogan ‘Nationalist in form, proletarian in content’ : the Communist guide-book to life applies everywhere regardless of differences in language, nationality—or life.

*Left Morals*

MORALITY can be divided into public morals, and ethics—private morality. Public morals provide codes of behaviour for public contacts and occasions, ethics apply to private contacts and occasions. A Londoner can pass for a well-behaved person in Manchester without changing his moral code ; uniformity in public morals is a test of national uniformity. The laws specify in what bad behaviour consists, as moral codes specify in what good behaviour consists. Behaviour may be legal (not bad), yet not moral (good), but cannot be moral and yet not legal. Public morality does not allow the individual to justify conventionally bad behaviour as good in special circumstances, but on the other hand the law cannot interfere in morals except where the moral breach is also a legal one. Thus, a certain measure of free moral judgement is left to the individual—if exercised in strict privacy, without public repercussions.

As politics include the responsibility of changing the laws when they require it, in accordance with advances in public morality, the political function may be said to be a quasi-moral one. But when politics rest exclusively upon opinions that have no moral accent, no reference to the actual moral tastes of the community, changes advocated on grounds of political opinion make a complete break in moral continuity, and the laws resulting from such political experimentalism have no moral accompaniment. Morality is then merely legal—the definition of what is bad.

Left politics make such a break with common moral tastes (called 'bourgeois'), and attempt to define a new morality in purely legal terms. In Left behaviour and Left writing there is an almost diabolical preoccupation with the 'bad'—and complete uncertainty about what is good. This uncertainty colours the whole Left moral outlook, and is especially apparent in the way the Left-minded person lives with his fellows in the ordinary course of 'bourgeois' experience. In his private life the Left person tends to lose the instinct for original behaviour; Marxist laws do not yet govern his community, and to its bourgeois morality he does not subscribe—so he suspends his moral existence. Marxist theory does not provide for the ethical details of behaviour, and is, indeed, destructive of moral subtlety. For example, part of the instruction given to promising young English Communists at the Lenin Institute in Moscow is a course in street-fighting. The Left-minded person tends to become a moral dunce as he advances in political wizardry.

The position of the Left person in 'capitalist society' is clearly an equivocal one. The old-fashioned Socialist was an idealist, and did not make a sharp distinction between political and moral values. He regarded Socialism as a wholesale extension of civilized moral values to political administration. The contemporary Left, by stressing political values above all others, puts himself in a curiously awkward moral quandary: How to reconcile life under capitalism with fundamental disloyalty to it. The only solution, then, is—compromise; so that in practice you find that the Left person makes unethical compromises which the non-political person of intelligence would be ashamed to make. You find the Left submitting to a full-dress church wedding to bribe his parents; you find him taking a job inconsistent

with his ideas because it offers better opportunities for political work. Often it is not merely a case of compromise, but of outright dishonesty—the Communist who holds a Civil Service appointment, or the Left writer who accepts a reviewing post on an anti-Left newspaper. Communists do not, in fact, openly face criticism as Communists, and may be regarded as living parasitically on capitalism.

Because of his general emotional flabbiness the Left person experiments with sex and theories of sex. What the Left achieves on the sexual front is little different from a super-bourgeois bohemianism. Lenin is reported by Clara Zetkin to have pointed out how good energy, which should have been available for political struggle, ran to waste, in sex :

Freudian theory is the modern fashion. I mistrust the sexual theories of the articles, dissertations, pamphlets, etc., in short, of that particular kind of literature which flourishes luxuriantly in the dirty soil of bourgeois society. I mistrust those who are always contemplating the sexual questions like the Indian saint his navel. It seems to me that these flourishing sexual theories which are mainly hypothetical, and quite often arbitrary hypotheses, arise from the personal need to justify personal abnormality or hypertrophy in sexual life before bourgeois morality and to entreat its patience. . . . Communism will not bring ascetism, but joy of life, power of life, and a satisfied love-life will help to do that.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin knew his Communists : his gospel here may be regarded as the reform of capitalist society through the reform of Communists.

Do Communists pay their debts ? The Communist intention toward the capitalist is avowedly that of expropriation, foreign capitalists included. This policy is excused as 'expropriation of the expropriators' ; but

<sup>1</sup> *Reminiscences of Lenin*, 1934.

causes a good deal of embarrassment to the smaller Communist Parties operating in capitalist countries. Printers, for example, like to impose special conditions of payment for Communist Party leaflets. The Communists, of course, are indignant, but it is not altogether due to the ingenuousness of printers, in taking Communist ideology literally. There have been instances of Communist 'locals' being so lax in respect of such payments that the leadership has had to intervene to maintain its prestige of capitalist solvency.

Sensitive Communists inevitably feel the contradiction between their ideological sympathies and normal (i.e. 'Capitalist') scruples about money. The Capitalist Thief is a convenient political fiction, though not one which can be applied in private dealings with people. And yet our Red Robin Hoods must occasionally feel the temptation very strongly: 'Can I regard this as a false debt, owed to the system?' The System certainly does not encourage the full-blooded Left. How then does he pay his way? The Communist Party employs a few with the pennies it takes from the workers or from rich Left sympathizers. A few have private incomes; a few accept old-fashioned parental help; a number live by the compromise of 'literature'. And we know that a good deal of informal borrowing goes on. Money, and economic honesty, become very unreal to the Left person—as very often happens with homosexuals. The Left money-problem is, indeed, rendered all the more nebulous by the clouds of homocommunism with which the Left atmosphere is inspissated.

The money problem is only one aspect of the moral dilemma which the Left person creates for himself: 'At what point do I cease being a Left and come under the jurisdiction of bourgeois morals?' The act of political revolution is not, in fact, very real for the Left

person ; much more real is the background of moral anarchy against which his political activities take place. In the political foreground the Left person is always very sure of himself ; in the personal background he is as anti-social as he dares to be. Among strangers, for example, he does not allow the ordinary conversational situation to develop until his suspicions have been allayed : he behaves stragetically, like a rather embarrassed sleuth. His apparatus for dealing with people, for forming judgements of people, is primitive—the casual acquaintance is an unknown quantity until he can be pigeon-holed as a political enemy or friend.

Are Left people difficult to live with ? The following advertisement from the *Daily Worker* suggests to what extent Left life is ' different ' :

#### WANTED

September. Working Housekeeper.  
Left wing family. Write Box, etc.

The problem of good domestic relations, it is here implied, is aggravated by the difficulty which the normal servant would find in accommodating herself to a superimposed Left atmosphere. It is as if a body political were forming within the body politic.

In 1932 I<sup>1</sup> went to the Soviet Union with a party of twenty-seven—students and others. There were four Communists in the party. Each morning of the sea voyage to Leningrad they used to meet and go through the list of passengers, recording their ' political level ', their individual interests and points of ' contact ' elicited during conversation the previous day, and assigning the appropriate literature and ' approach ' for the day's ' contact work '. This zealous behaviour gave the ship an atmosphere of being full of keen but incompetent

<sup>1</sup> H. K.



private detectives. A friend told me that she was constantly aware of being the quarry of some earnest pursuer who, to her surprise, only wanted a little political chat. Of course, if you go to the Soviet Union, you go with a determination to wink at the eccentricities of Left propaganda methods. But on one's own home ground one does not like to go about winking.

What is the Left attitude to parents? A Left does not refer to 'my awful mother' (if she is awful), or to 'my irritating father' (if he does irritate); he would probably say, or think, 'my reactionary parents' (however innocent of political machination they might be). Wealthy parents are genuinely distressed when their sons or daughters disinherit themselves 'for the cause'. If, underneath it all, the 'children' are sympathetic to the human situation they have created, their behaviour is, indeed, that of children; the fatted calf is killed on visits home. But the prodigal's conscience will not let him forget his ideological allegiance. He takes advantage of his right as a child of the house to be indulged, bringing home with him the manners of revolt, which offend the neighbours. At some point the parents put their foot down—'We've managed to live down the reputation of having a Marxist son, but we can't live down the scandal of having a Nudist one as well.'

The Left attitude to employers is expressed in the term 'class-consciousness'. Class-consciousness should mean being personally adapted to the circumstances, and nuances of thought and feeling, characteristic of the given social environment. Class-consciousness is a kind of wisdom; it is, one might say, the faculty of practising one's own kind of parochialism in a socially sensitive way—a modern faculty of independence equivalent to the old craftsman feelings of self-respect.

It has nothing to do with traditional class wrongs or with economic misfortunes ; it is, rather, the prerequisite for dealing with these in a morally dignified way. English working-class people have developed this faculty of self-reliant practical wisdom during a long history of local self-government, as the English ruling class has developed a similar faculty of quiet administrative wisdom during an equally long history of international as well as national responsibility.

The Conservative looks upon class-consciousness in the Marxist sense as bad manners—which the Left notes with a political sneer. Good manners are a technique of co-operativeness, and the English are by nature well-mannered. The Russian Communists treat international manners in dealing with capitalist countries as a fashionable encumbrance. Lenin, though a realist, nevertheless viewed diplomatic technique as a strategic affectation, like a top hat—‘if we have to appear in petticoats we shall do so’.

Fraternal methods of dealing with employers go very much against the Communist grain—Labour advocates of such methods are ‘social-fascists’. Similarly, you do not find the Left individual making a personal response to an over-bearing or vindictive employer ; his conviction is that *all* employers are bad, and so he responds with abstract hatred—‘class-consciousness’. Personal hatred is no basis for solving the problems of production, which can only be dealt with as co-operative problems, as they arise ; an ideology of hatred is still less practicable. The ordinary working man will get angry with his employer, or his employer’s representative, and real anger is useful in that it forces the point at issue on the attention of those immediately capable of doing something about it. Deliberately cultivated feelings of hatred on the subject of class wrongs obscure the points at issue,

and irritate into hostile attitudes of defence those who could otherwise be moved to a conscience about them.

Left relations with other Lefts breathe out an air of vindictive hostility. A report by 'Peterborough' in the *Daily Telegraph* (11/8/37) gives a picture typical of the comedy of errors which Lefts stage among themselves :

Ideological warfare has broken out between the Socialist party and the Left Book Club, that very active propaganda body founded by Mr. Victor Gollancz just over a year ago.

The trouble has arisen over the United Front. Unity, in fact, has proved the greatest source of disunion the Socialist movement has known for a very long time.

The Big Three of the Left Book Club—Mr. Victor Gollancz, Mr. John Strachey, and Mr. Harold Laski—recently offered the official Socialist party space in their magazine *The Left News*.

This was for articles on Socialist policy coincident with the September conference of the T.U.C. at Norwich and the October conference of the Socialist party at Bournemouth.

The offer was made by Mr. Laski to Dr. Dalton, as Chairman of the National Executive of the Socialist party. But though it came from his former fellow-lecturer at the London School of Economics, Dr. Dalton turned it down.

Dr. Dalton and his colleagues refused co-operation, firstly, on the ground that the Left Book Club and its magazine were 'consistently critical of the present leadership of the party'. Still more heinous was the second offence—that the Club's books are too Left, and advocate the United Front.

Hitting back, Dr. Dalton became 'critical of the present leadership' of the Club. He even suggested that the selection committee of three should be strengthened by two or three representatives of the official Socialist view. This the Club committee declined to accept. Negotiations have now been broken off until after October.

Mr. Attlee himself has written the August 'choice', *The Labour Party in Perspective*. His party colleagues, Lord

Addison and Mr. A. V. Alexander, are billed for future months in this literary United Front with the Communists and Liberals.

Later developments are described in the *Daily Dispatch* (27/2/39) :

The announcement of a Labour Book Club coincides with the issue of the first volume by the Liberal Book Club.

Is the Labour venture another phase of the Popular Front battle which resulted in the expulsion from the Socialist Party of Sir Stafford Cripps ? For 'General' Gollancz has been looked upon as a supporter of Sir Stafford.

When ideological warfare breaks out between Rights and Lefts, it is understood that there are differences of principle at stake to account for the battle-atmosphere. But when Left politicians, with supposedly identical aims, are constantly bickering, one must conclude that the Left position itself is responsible. If being a Left has this sort of effect on people, what effect would a Left system of life have on humanity as a whole ?

*Left Pleasure*

IF THE LEFT PERSON keeps up an uncompromising Left attitude all the time—and that must be the aim of the conscientiously Left person—all his pleasure must come directly or indirectly from the sensation of being Left. He must eliminate all experience that does not stimulate this sensation. Therefore the surest Left pleasure is argument, as has been said at the beginning of this book. Argument is not work, but pleasure; its sole object is the pleasure of feeling oneself in the right. And it is the key in which Left social intercourse is pitched, and supplies the background for Left activities of all kinds.

From the *Daily Worker* :

## PERSONAL

If Fenchurch Trip Communist wants  
continue argument, write Box, etc. . .

A cell of conscientious Communists played rugby football for the Bank they worked in. They treated their fellow-members as so much material for conversion, and regarded the setting of high standards in their play as a point of political prestige. The other players bore the constant political talk to and from the matches with remarkable good humour—largely because the Communists were such good players. But to the Communists the football was work, and the arguing the real sport.

If you are a Communist, you cannot really enjoy conversation unless it is argument. The Left person does not understand conversation in which the note of

argument does not appear ; he regards it as ' aimless ' conversation—' mere talk '. The pleasure of friendly intercourse for its own sake is taboo to him. In Left life all the informal graces of friendship tend to be absorbed in the monotony of Left conversation, and in organized Left activities and points of view. People cease to be friends of one another. They are friends of the proletariat ; or Friends of the Soviet Union—which provides them with approved conversational adventure on a wide range of given subjects, from the quantity of pig-iron produced by Soviet industry to the provisions for maternal welfare in the Sovkhoz.

People who constantly employ argument as a method of expressing themselves must be looked upon as people of limited intelligence : their intelligence is limited to subjects on which they have ' good ' arguments. The freely intelligent person is not confined to controversial subjects on which he has an immovable opinion. Lefts appear to derive a perverse pleasure from the vehemence with which they can state their case, the fighting spirit they can put into words—to the confounding of all civilized retort. ' We'll shake 'em up ' was the remark of some Communists invited to state the case for Communism at a provincial debating society—and the members were duly appalled by the fierce heat introduced by their guests into the atmosphere of mild repartee to which they were accustomed. If you are invited to visit an aged and respectable aunt, in whose drawing-room stands a cabinet of cherished, frail pieces of china, you naturally do not think it funny to lean against it dangerously just to tease your aunt—unless you are the unintelligent nephew, or a Communist. In an issue of the *Daily Worker* people are invited to buy booklets of stamps on which is printed Harry Pollitt's photograph and a slogan. They are further invited to

stick these 'on the boss's desk, lamp-posts or other public places' in order 'to get the paper more widely known'. The purpose is propaganda, but the appeal is to the Left's weakness for petty provocation.

In the Left attitude to pleasure the accent is on what is to be disliked rather than liked: much Left pleasure is simply that of disliking things. If you accept the values of Left literary criticism, for example, you cannot really enjoy reading other-than-Left books; you read them therefore to disagree with them, to exercise your faculty for dislike. You have, in fact, no healthy reason for reading them at all. If Left criticism were confined to literature of which it could express approval, there would be considerably less Left criticism. Similarly, if all Left people read only Left books, as they logically should, the more intelligent ones would soon cease to be Left, from intellectual starvation.

Left politics are exaggeratedly preoccupied with the wrongs people suffer: the Left person accepts responsibility for evils which only wiser minds than his could banish—and which take the place of pleasurable objects of contemplation. Enjoyment of the gloomy social picture is made mystically equivalent to political action. Getting pleasure from things that are not gloomy may actually seem immoral to the Left person, politically irresponsible: people are thus indulging in 'capitalist pleasure', they are being 'doped'. In *Fact*, July 1937, for example, John Allen, comparing the Socialist with the West-end play-goer, says: 'Socialists are aware of the great movements of their times, and they want to see these movements expressed in the theatre. Entertainment is not for them confined to drivelling comedies about fornication. They are entertained not by being side-tracked and doped, but by being instructed and enlightened'. But intelligent interest in the theatre is not,

after all, merely a choice of serious as against light themes. Left standards of dramatic good taste get no further than calling light amusement vulgar.

The Left person's attitude to pleasure is like the Puritan's attitude to sin—he is opposed to it. He must be constantly on guard against enjoying himself. He must keep an eye out all the time for 'wrongs'. At the Circus he will be worrying about the clowns' wages. At the Fair he will be angered by the wretched conditions in which the gipsies are obliged to live by 'Conditions'. He does not appreciate the play at the theatre unless he is sure that the actors have the power to strike. All the poor injured people he suffers for do not know how discontented they have a right to be ! His mission in life is to tell them, so that they may start suffering too, become class-conscious and teach others to suffer. He must be 'there' all the time—at the theatre, the party, or the Coronation—but he mustn't take part in the fun. Here is a picture of the Left missionary at the Hackney Wick Stadium :

Benny Caplan, who took the Southern Area feather-weight title from Dick Corbett, deserved the verdict.

But most significant happening on Monday was the unfriendly reception given to Colonel Myddleton, chairman of the British Boxing Board of Control, when introduced by Buster Cohen, the M.C.

#### THERE'S A MORAL.

Fans, unfortunately, know only too little of the muck that is in the boxing game.

But I get the feeling when attending shows—as I often do—that the hard and painstaking work of the National Union of Boxers is taking root. (From the *Daily Worker's* Sports page.)

Left people carry a burden which makes them seem on all festive occasions the oldest people present. A



great deal of the normal person's pleasure is without logical purpose—has no purpose except that of pleasure. Lefts do not understand such purposelessness, would not consider pleasure alone a sufficient reason for doing anything. In considering Left pleasures, therefore, it is more pertinent to ask 'What does being Left do to pleasure?' than 'What are Left pleasures?' In one way or another all the apparently normal pleasures—good food, good drink, cinema, theatre, travel, reading—are pleasures of Capitalism: in some way connected with 'profit'. The Left person, absorbed himself in the gloomy picture, cannot believe that anything is so good, so likeable, as it seems. And so you get the Left Abstainer, the Left Ascetic, the Left Scrooge, who cannot really rejoice, be really gay, because of those wretched statistics about Capitalism.

Actually, the Left pattern of behaviour is so prohibitive of pleasurable accompaniments that only the true Left Martyr could live by it unswervingly. For the most part Lefts are only able to attain to a very imperfect condition of martyrdom—they fall frequently into sinful pleasure.

The Left is confronted by much experience which cannot, at first analysis, be interpreted as 'wrong'. This worries him; he cannot allow himself to enjoy it, because he feels that proper analysis would reveal it to be wrong, yet meanwhile it is there, to be resisted though for no reason. In this dilemma the safest way is to dislike everything and regard one's pleasure-emotions as suspended until things are 'different' and one can automatically like everything. The following verses from a poem present this emotional trick as a legitimate poetic attitude. It is by Keidrich Rhys, and entitled 'Building Job' (from *Twentieth-Century Verse*, No. 3):

Remain 9 a.m. meeting outside the cemetery gates  
Frequent breath born in tool conditioned filth  
Brickies like others whirl through voracious wealth  
Follow deputation with mute springline guts.

While the taxi weeds them on accident hire  
There hospitals, first toadstools then as hoots.  
Dinner. Two inches in water the wearing out boots  
Of sprinkler chaps fooled with id. an hour.

Beyond the hated dirty work, prophetic days  
Of unanimous decision shed lustre. All futures.  
Investment force with rotten boroughs gone. Natures  
Built with these skilled hands, these sympathetic dyes.

This is a revealing account of the mental misery in which the Left lives—not because the wrongs he observes fill him with anguish (he does far less actual observing of wrongs than the old-fashioned slum-worker, who really knew his slums), but because his politics make him nervous of liking anything. He can only keep himself from going mad by dreaming of a time when politics will begin to shed an all-transforming lustre and everything will begin to be different. Thus the harmless lunatic, fancying himself to be Napoleon, keeps himself from going mad by dreaming that one day, through his persistence, people will recognize that he really is Napoleon—meanwhile everything in his life is all wrong.

## *Left Humour*

HUMOUR is fundamentally benevolent ; laughter fundamentally an expression of amiable pleasure. Pleasant humour is more common in everyday experience than unpleasant humour. When humour is used in attack the thing of which fun is made must be shown to be funny in being bad. In genuinely humorous criticism there is always some indulgence of the thing criticized : there can be no real joke where criticism is entirely destructive. In Low's *Hit and Muss* cartoons, for example, the strategy of humour is employed to reduce Hitler and Mussolini to trivial figures. We are not asked to hate them, but rather to relax our indignation for the moment in the contemplation of their ridiculousness.

In the Communist cartoon, humour and hate are combined ; and the result is to make hate an abstract emotion. In Communist criticism, which is accustomed to make free use of the strategy of humour, hate is always, indeed, 'ideological'. The Communist cartoon excites no spontaneous reaction of pleasure in the joke ; there can be no joke if the hate is never relaxed, if no quality of Olympian indulgence is allowed to operate. In the Communist cartoon the subject is always outrageous rather than funny. In addition, there is a line-heaviness about Communist standard representations of Capitalism, Fascism, the Worker, which reflects the word-heaviness of Communist argument. Every instrument of pictorial humour has been

blunted by ideological use. If the things and persons attacked in the ruthlessly Left cartoon are really as bad as they are made to seem, then it is wrong to try to be humorous about them.

In caricature some feature is exaggerated in order to make you laugh, and there must be something hitherto undetected as well as something obvious in the exaggeration. For an enjoyable moment it all seems plausible, though ridiculous. The conventional Left caricature gives no such moment, and is only plausible if you supplement its absurdities with Socialist or Communist theory. No instantaneous response is evoked; it drives home the same old image, hateful Capitalism, and has an effect that is contrary to the purpose of caricature, which is to give a refreshingly unfrightening perception of a worrying subject.

The Communist view of life does not permit of light-hearted criticism, although many of the things that Communists want to criticize, such as the foibles of the bourgeois, cannot be sensibly criticized except in a light way. Marx and Engels, the fathers of Communist irony, spoiled the possibilities of Communist humour at the start with their clumsy insistence on the comic dreadfulness of the objects of their attacks. They were, that is, smiling laboriously in order to entice their readers to succumb to their conclusions—which *they* thought irresistible. With irony you must let others discover the irresistible funniness of your subject, and keep a straight face yourself. But you can't do this unless you are secretly as amused as you expect your readers to be—and neither Marx nor Engels was really amused. A favourite trick of Lenin's was the use of parentheses to place ironic emphasis on an opponent's word or phrase, and the Communists of to-day imitate this trick religiously in their prose—which really does no more than

tell you that the author thinks the political point irresistible. In any case, political irony is out-of-date. It ceased to be effective when politics ceased to be a personal duel of wit between opposite points of view ; Communists, at least, deny the possibility of other points of view—and are therefore incapable of political play.

In his letters to Dr. Kugelmann, Marx is occasionally playful about his political activities :

My cordial thanks to your dear wife for the trouble she took in copying the letter. You should not exploit her so much for her 'surplus labour' (30th November 1867).

Tell your wife I never 'suspected' her of being one of Generaless Geck's subordinates. My question was only intended as a joke. In any case ladies cannot complain of the *International*, for it has elected a lady, Madame Law, to be a member of the General Council (12th December 1868).

['Generaless' Geck was a German feminist. In a previous letter Marx had asked whether Frau Kugelmann was active 'in the great German campaign for the emancipation of women']

In getting a respectable middle-class doctor's wife to do a little secretarial work for him, Marx was uniting purposefulness with playfulness ; and the effect is not pleasant. The second piece of wit is not even clumsily gallant ; the ill-tempered note is uppermost. Marx was showing that he could not really be bothered with courteous niceties of humour : he was an Important Man. Dr. Kugelmann himself felt this ; long after he had quarrelled with Marx's uncompromising revolutionary policy, he cherished the letters as the 'greatest pride of his life'.

Mr. T. A. Jackson, a Marxist, in a contribution to a solemn discussion on Marx's quotation of Shakespeare, notes 'the significant fact that while Goethe's work

appealed most strongly to the tragic side of Marx's artistic consciousness, it was, on the contrary, its comic side which found a never-failing stimulus in the works of Shakespeare'.<sup>1</sup> Marx apparently believed himself a wit: he and Shakespeare were fellow-humourists, Shakespeare supplying the fun, he the political point. Mr. Jackson explains at length, for the benefit of Netchkina, a Russian contributor to the discussion, a reference to Louis Napoleon's 10th Thermidor, which, Marx says, 'impersonated the proletariat as Snug the Joiner impersonated the lion'.<sup>2</sup> Marx quoted Shakespeare to point his argument in *Das Kapital*; the modern Marxist collects all these allusions for their value as pointers to the Marxist interpretation of Shakespeare. Mr. Jackson haggles with Netchkina for 'falling completely into error in her estimate of the *historical* (as well as the *dramatic*) significance of the character of Falstaff'. A paragraph from his elucidation shows the Marxist struggling for life in the Shakespearean quicksands.

Falstaff, in blustering his way out of a difficulty, says: 'if reasons were as plentiful as blackberries, I would not give you one on compulsion!' Marx (in an article in *Vorwaerts*) replying to Heinzen—who had alleged that 'the princes are the chief authors of poverty and enslavement'—retorts that (a) this 'explanation' is obviously invalidated where princedom has been abolished; and (b) it is refuted concretely by the *republican* U.S.A. in which the slavery-system ('upon which the ancient republics broke down') was, at that time flourishing! 'The slavery-system,' says Marx, 'might well exclaim (*i.e.* to Heinzen) with Jack Falstaff: "if reasons were as plentiful as blackberries"...!' Obviously, to any one who knows the passage to which Marx alludes, the point lies in the words implied but not quoted—'*I would not give*

<sup>1</sup> *Marx and Shakespeare*. International Literature, No. 2, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx.

*you one*'. That Marx is here 'guilty' of a pun and a double one since the words '*not even on compulsion*' are further implied, has completely escaped Netchkina, who 'explains' that 'slavery . . . might agree with Falstaff in wishing that reasons were as plentiful', etc. Netchkina misunderstands Falstaff's words badly enough; but far more serious is the fact that her lack of understanding in this respect causes her to misrepresent Marx's witty use of them.

When Marx or any loyal Marxian disciple makes the plunge into humour—for the sake of the Cause—it is always a case of the political point coming to the rescue of humourlessness.

Communists are supposed to be intelligent people, yet being Communists incapacitates them from seeing how comic, and often ridiculous, much of their behaviour is. It is not enough to say that they lack humour where Communism is concerned. Communism is for them an all-inclusive term: it is supposed to include even humour. A Communist at a party where most of the guests are Communists goes about saying: 'Can any one give me a definition of propaganda?' No one laughs: every one tries to remember. If some non-Communist, however, suggests: 'Why not look it up in the Oxford Dictionary?' this will, of course, convulse the Communists. Mr. J. R. Campbell, a leading Communist, writing on 'Behaviour, Marxism and Man' (*Daily Worker*, 12/1/38): 'Man is a risen animal—an elevated ape—but the laws of the development of human society are different from those obtaining in the animal world'. The only fun a Communist would be permitted to get out of this hilarious statement would be some such jocular comment to himself as 'Capitalist Apes'!

In Russia one is not allowed to make humorous criticisms of the Party or of Communism. The only

anti-Marxist joke I<sup>1</sup> heard while in Russia was made by a woman on a tram who was irritated by some one who jumped on and jostled people standing inside : ' That's not a Marxist approach to a tram ! ' But I am told that in private there are almost as many jokes against the régime as in Nazi Germany. The trouble about being restricted to one kind of joke is that it ceases in time to be a joke : it either turns into indifference or leads to assassination.

Barbusse, in his biography of Stalin, 1934, describes Kremlin playfulness behind the scenes, at the Moscow Grand Opera on the occasion of Gorki's jubilee :

The noise was deafening and every one was laughing uproariously. Among others there was Stalin, Ordjonekidze, Rykoff, Bubnoff, Molotoff, Voroshiloff, Kaganovitch and Piatnitsky. They were recounting anecdotes of the Civil War and recalling amusing incidents :

' Do you remember when you fell off your horse ? '

Stalin : ' Yes, the filthy brute, I don't know what was the matter with it. . . . '

And there followed homeric laughter, a power of joy, a thunder of youth, which shook the old Tsarist walls—a short, sweet respite from the grim labour of reconstruction.

Another explanation of the laughter might be that Stalin, Ordjonekidze, Rykoff, Bubnoff, Molotoff, Voroshiloff, Kaganovitch, Piatnitsky, and others more unpronounceable, were suddenly overcome with the fun of being O so Russian and yet pledged to a Germanic philosophy of social order.

Barbusse makes much of Lenin's and Stalin's laughter, as an advertisement for Socialism—' and, as it were, in the same category, comes their irony '. But this is the only indication he gives of the subjects and the quality of the laughter. Communists, as a matter of

<sup>1</sup> H. K.



fact, do very little laughing. Before the revolution they must cultivate grimness in themselves, in preparation for 'the grim labour of reconstruction'. As for Communist irony: it lies in their not feeling the emotions of humour at all when they are being humorous—underneath they are consistently grim. For real humour from them you must wait until after the reconstruction. Then there will be a Five-Year Plan for the development of Heavy and Light Humour to supplement the Five-Year Plans for the development of Heavy and Light Industry.

In its propaganda the Communist Party construes a humourless working class, does not allow for a sense of humour in the working class; naturally the effect of their propaganda is to make the working class humourless. Yet, in spite of all the harm they do, one cannot but pity Communists for the gloom with which they surround themselves. Mr. Day Lewis, speaking at the Queen's Hall (8th June 1938) in Defence (curiously enough) of Intellectual Liberty, remarked of some Fascist imbecility which made the audience laugh, 'Yes, it would be funny if it were not tragic.' This is true—curiously enough—of all Communist humour.

One can learn certain things about the way in which people think from the kind of jokes they make; whether their minds work crudely or delicately, sloppily or tidily, childishly or maturely. Communists like making jokes which would be tragic if they did not find them so funny: that the Turks, for example, used Vickers guns against British troops during the war. The Communist political joke is, in fact, often merely cynical—a joke made in bad humour. Much of their humour consists of jibes at the fatuous; much is itself old-fashioned fatuousness. For example, the following by Mr. G. W. Sinfield from the *Daily Worker's* sports

page—about the British Women's ping-pong team—is a piece of old-fashioned bad taste :

### IVOR MONTAGU'S JOB

Our girls are also on top note, that is the incompleated team comprising Miss Osborne, Miss Dora Endin, and Miss D. Jordan, are shaping like they ought under the care of Mrs. Bundy, their non-playing captain.

Incidentally, Ivor Montagu, an extremely busy and elusive man these days, has the same honour as Mrs. Bundy, but for the men.

Wonder which job he would really prefer ? No offence meant, Ivor ! No offence, matey !

One of the chief disadvantages of being a Communist must be that you miss many good jokes. Do Communists enjoy jokes about sex, money, drink, the lower classes ? Not if they are good Communists all the time—and they are not good Communists if they are not good Communists all the time. Let us say, to be generous, that they frequently enjoy 'ordinary' humour in secret. But the effect of a consistently Left point of view is to deny healthy outlet to many normal emotions—not because they are immoral emotions, but because the occasions provided in life under capitalism are not held worthy of fun or sensuous enjoyment. And so the fig tree of good spirits is made to wither, in demonstration of what may be accomplished by faith in Communism.

And it all began, please remember, not in lazy-hazy Russia—forty *versts* from Nowhere, Little Father, and only half a *pood* of bread left : but in Germany, home of doctoral dialectics, *Simplicissimus* wit, suicidal trapeze-craft, and the grimmest clowning in the world.

*Left Taste*

THE DEVELOPMENT of good taste—the technique of harmony in daily living and also that of making oneself attractive to other people—is a necessary part of the civilized person's education. In Left society, however, the person who sets high standards in his personal appearance, in the appointments of his house, and in his pleasures and manners generally, is regarded as being self-centred, a snob. The Left who has been brought up to like beautiful things is sensitive to such strategical attacks upon his bourgeois delicacy, and allows himself to be bullied out of any refinements that still cling to him. He is obliged to be pleased by this loss of bourgeois habits, because many of his new-found comrades are by nature uncouth—they would soon detect the 'difference' and despise him. No one who matters will call him a prig for sinking his social and cultural graces in self-serious abasement to 'the masses'.

The Left person is disdainful of non-political enthusiasms. He resents 'charm' as a matter of policy ; and his own enthusiasms are without charm because they can only be expressed in the form of dislike. In Left life you are not meant to bestow affection upon anything that cannot be diagnosed as in some way symptomatic of modern revolutionary tendencies. You are not meant to like anything for its own sake, as an adornment of life : to dress well, to live well, is an affectation which tells against you. Working-class Communists are invariably

suspicious of the educated Left sympathizer, especially if his appearance is in the least symbolic of capitalist luxury. There is a sameness, a dismal lack of splendour about the appearance of Lefts in the mass—Communist impressiveness, even in Russia, is a matter of red bunting and crowds primed with an heroic sense of their working-class character.

How do Left people dress? The young Communist League favours, for male demonstrators, a khaki shirt, the red tie of the old school of Socialists and etiolated trousers. Preferred female wear: red scarf, respectable jacket, that old skirt. In Party circles a severe respectability is demanded, ostentation of any kind being viewed as a political mistake. The effect of such purist dictates on Left sympathizers is to develop a shame of the pleasant appearance; they may look clean and tidy, but must not look well-groomed. Nevertheless they privately hate the Nessus shirt of Communism so long as there is a spark of life left in them.

In Russia, men, particularly Party men, wear a semi-uniform; and one hears that traditional peasant dress is disappearing. In 1932 a troupe of dancers dressed in peasant costume danced and sang for the benefit of tourists in one of the Moscow hotels, the words of the songs being propaganda for the Collective Farms—to emphasize the march of time that had been going on. Quite recently Moscow women were subjected to ballots in the co-operatives to determine the demand for a number of commodities, including various patterns of dresses. Communists pointed to this at the time as an example of the greater control that the emancipated working women of the U.S.S.R. possess in comparison with their unfortunate sisters under capitalism. When taste becomes a ballot-box matter, with dress-patterns for candidates, then one kind of enthusiasm does for

everything : political enthusiasm. And one kind of dress-pattern.

What is the Left home like ? In the first place, it is not a home in the ordinary sense—it is not a centre of strong personal interests and associations, but of strong opinions. It is a place where you eat and sleep—and talk politics without having to listen to one another. In the U.S.S.R. the factory, and not the home, is the centre of life for the loyal Soviet citizen. In general it may be said that the quality of homeliness in Left life is replaced by the club-spirit.

Lenin, so Clara Zetkin tells us in her *Reminiscences*, preserved the utmost severity in his personal and domestic amenities in the Kremlin : ‘I have been in more than one worker’s home furnished more richly than that of the “all-powerful Muscovite dictator”’—which seems to indicate that Communists are officially expected not to waste their ‘powers’ in making their immediate surroundings very comfortable or very gracious. The old-fashioned Socialist took a real pride in being well-educated and in showing that being a Socialist did not prevent his leading a sophisticated life, having a pleasantly furnished house, being liberal in his enjoyment of the theatre, of music, of literature. He felt that he had a responsibility of setting high standards of culture for the working classes of the future. The Communist, however, is trained to be indifferent to pleasant contacts and domestic surroundings, and even to despise them as ‘bourgeois’ self-indulgence and self-delusion. The educated Communist of ex-good taste is expected to acquire the point of view that good taste is bad taste : thus he can flatter himself that he still has good taste. ‘The times’ are not held to be ripe for the manifestation of joy-in-life : you must not weaken your enthusiasm for better times by finding pleasure in any-

thing that life provides now. In Left life there are no details, only 'major issues'. Although the Communist lays great stress on 'living conditions', his treatment of his own physical surroundings is vilely Capitalistic.

How does the fighting Left react to old things—old furniture, old silver and plate, old jewellery? He cannot be altogether comfortable with them, even if he knows their value and has a technical appreciation of their beauty. Inevitably, he must regard them as sentimental clutter, or as interesting social and economic relics. The conscientious Communist takes himself to be the modern type for the individual, and scorns commitments to the past. If he has an irrepressible interest in old things, then that is given play in some part of his life regarded as 'illogical'; or it may be sublimated to Communist level by comparisons between the soulless products of Capitalism and the beautiful products of the days of craft—prophetic of Communism, under which machines will have souls.

When an upper-class person goes into a working-class person's room he may think that it shows bad taste from his point of view, but he will feel nevertheless that the things in it—the furniture, the ornaments, the decorations—have been chosen. If you enter a Left person's room you do not feel that any conscious process of selection has taken place; the things in the room do not evince taste, either good or bad. Similarly, if you look into the Communist mind, you do not feel that anything either good or bad is being chosen. Before one can choose one must acknowledge a quantity of different things to choose from; but the Communist mind works by rejecting and reducing rather than by selecting. The Left writer has fewer subjects to write about than the ordinary writer; and with the subjects provided he must confine his range of interest to a few

simple contexts. He is forced to dwell as much as possible on physical misfortune, so as to make his plea for political discontent more realistic ; he must specialize in the unpleasant theme because it allows him to rub in the class moral.

In being concentrated on a restricted set of subjects all the time, the Left mood prevents liking, paralyses the power of choice. By not making full use of his power of choice, and his emotions, the Left person loses directness of approach in his exercise of taste. His taste is not that of an emotionally free individual ; it is subject to an official scheme of likes and dislikes—mostly dislikes. The Left taste in books, for example, is limited to those which confirm a conventional dislike of Capitalism. In reading it is not permissible to enjoy all that is there. You do not find the Left person ‘losing himself’ in a novel ; he does not let himself become absorbed in the details of the setting, of the characters, of the writing, but scans the material for occasions to the Left political attack.

Most intelligent people realize that mass-production brings evils with it as well as extensive material benefits. Mass-production sacrifices qualities of individual workmanship in the product, makes the work itself an uninteresting routine, induces social overcrowding, is prey to uncontrollable waste, and so on. The Communist analysis takes no notice of the quality of the mass-produced article, but is designed to show that better organized mass-production, under Communist direction, will solve the problem of working-class poverty. His solution is, in fact, the promise of more wealth for the workers at the level of the worst capitalist taste.

Marxist economic theory reflects the low level of Communist taste in the stress which is laid on the instrumentalities of life. A physical object has only

the attributes of a commodity. It is a 'product of labour' and a 'use-value'—a value capable of satisfying a human want. A human want, the Marxist would explain, is an item in the aggregate of wants the satisfaction of which renews the workers' 'labour-power' from day to day. The Marxist, in fact, insists upon a tasteless view of human wants and tasteless satisfaction of them.

In his attack on books, and political opponents, the Left puts himself beyond criticism on grounds of taste. For example, Ivor Montagu, reviewing a book in the *Daily Worker*, expresses himself as follows :

For Mr. Borkenau, Communists are sectarian, Trotskyists 'devoid of heresy-hunting', Russia has achieved 'a bureaucratic tyranny'. He finally reaches the conclusion that the regime enforcing political conformity in Republican Spain is less free than medieval Catholicism. But he is not an opponent.

'On the contrary,' he says, 'I wished the movement well.'

Faugh ! One wants to rinse one's mouth after reading such a gentleman.

It is not attractive ; but not repulsive, either. It is simply unreal. Nobody talks like that, writes like that, thinks like that. Except Communists.



*Left Theatre*

It is not necessary in such a paper as this <sup>1</sup> to spend much time confuting the notion that you can't mix art and politics—though people still bleat out this fantastic piece of dogmatism at the end of a performance of *Waiting for Lefty* which defiantly and extremely successfully does mix art and politics.

MR. JOHN ALLEN, of the Unity Theatre Club, here defiantly disregards the remarks of playgoers who have been irritated by his Club's productions—because they seemed to proceed from a different kind of dogmatism from his own. To a Communist, that is, standards of drama that are not identifiable with Left political standards represent a different—and therefore fantastic—political point of view.

What are, familiarly speaking, the ingredients of a good play? A coherent and energetic plot, one that is ingenious or moving, that includes a credible variety of characters and incidents, that has a theme sufficiently unfamiliar in significance or treatment to make you feel the play as something 'new'. And compelling dialogue, of a kind that you would stop to listen to anywhere, if met with in living conversation. And characters of a sufficient individuality to be an addition to your experience of people. And what might be called a moral argument leading to some conclusion which is not a dead moral cliché. A play must deal with the private rather than the public consequences of speech

<sup>1</sup> *Fact*, July 1937.

and action, and differs from real life in that the action and dialogue are concentrated extracts rather than imitations or exaggerations.

We need not test the characteristics of the Left play at tedious length to see how far short it falls of these reasonable requirements. The Left play is something besides a play: a political speech. There must therefore be a generous sprinkling of Left people in it, or the audience must be made to wince at their absence; and the non-Left people introduced must be at once the villains of the play and of the speech contained in it. Not only is the choice of characters limited, but the plot is restricted to situations in which Left people may appear on propaganda errands; or to situations which can be made to seem distressing or ridiculous by the absence of Left people or the Left point of view.

The problem of finding plays suitable for presentation in the Left theatre is a difficult one. As Mr. Allen points out, on the one hand there are the 'unconverted, for whose benefit the political message must be not sugared but humanized'; on the other there are the 'already converted, the politically conscious, who require entertainment in their plays so long as it is not at the expense of a clear political line'. So far the Unity Theatre Club has had to pursue a 'double policy' of showing liberal plays for the benefit of the unconverted; and sketches, burlesques and mass recitations voicing strong Left-wing opinions for the benefit of Communists.

The Left playwright's problem is that of finding themes suitable for political treatment. *Waiting for Lefty*, by Odets, is written on a strike theme. A meeting of Trade Unionists awaits the arrival of a Communist; meanwhile a strike is discussed. Several 'inset' scenes illustrate some domestic aspects of a strike. Then, more of the meeting, and a demagogic speech by the chairman.

Nothing more interesting happens during the first three-quarters of the play than talk about strikes from various points of view. Towards the end of *Peter Pan* the audience is asked to save Tinker Bell, who is dying in a cup of poison: 'Do you believe in fairies?' In Odets' play, during the last scene, there are angry cries of 'We want Lefty' from the auditorium, and you are encouraged to make the Left faith-response by joining in a crescendo of shouting ('like a real demonstration,' an enthusiast points out to his neighbour)—'Do you believe in Lefty?'

If you had a special interest in the psychology of political meetings, or of strikes, or of Left plays, the play would have a documentary interest-value. If you were a revolutionary, but afraid to show it, you could let off steam here without danger of arrest. But the non-political playgoer would be bored, and probably irritated. Left audiences, however, enjoy the play. The Left playgoer, you see, knows why strikes really happen, enjoys picking out the 'good' and 'bad' speeches at the meeting, and plays his noise-providing part with gusto. When Lefty enters, he is shot.<sup>1</sup> This allows Lefty's audience to leave the theatre more strongly convinced than ever of the capitalists' villainy.

*Where's that Bomb?* by Herbert Hodge, a London taxi-driver, is another play that has been popular with Unity Theatre Club audiences. Joe Dexter, worker-poet, loses his job for mixing art with politics and publishing the result in a magazine. He is in debt. A British Patriot calls and asks him to write a Patriotic Novel to be printed on toilet paper—'the lavatory being the only sanctum into which capitalist propaganda has not penetrated'. In the second act, Money Power appears and has the story acted before Dexter, but his

<sup>1</sup> Which would be funny if it were not so tragic, or *vice versa*.

puppets are so disgusted by the story that they revolt against him. Next morning when the British Patriot comes to collect the story and hand over the fifty pounds, Dexter tears it up : ' I am not the person to write novels for the lavatory,' he says. ' Get the journalists to. That's what they've been doing for years.'

Mr. Allen describes this kind of play as a ' cartoon ' in which ' vice is painted very black and virtue very white '. It represents, in fact, the Communist revival of melodrama. For the ordinary modern playgoer melodrama is too crude morally to be either interesting or entertaining, though its highly seasoned characters and lurid emotional situations can be enjoyed when treated as farce. Communists are the only supposedly intelligent people who can still take melodrama seriously ; in any but the Communist mind melodrama immediately turns itself into farce.

There are not enough Communist melodramas, apparently, to keep the Left theatre going, so Left producers are compelled to resort to glamour-boys like W. H. Auden. The members of the Unity Theatre Club, who are all working-class, only extend to Auden a sort of pale praise. Mr. Allen says :

Rightly, I think, they do not attack Auden's exclusiveness, his eternal adolescence, his boy-scout mother-love complexes, his irritating neuroses, his lack of anything positive and forthright, judging that if that's the way he feels about things, that's the way he should write. The feeling is simply that he is speaking another language, writing for another class.

Auden, it seems, is doing valuable work for the Communists in his own queer way. ' He is the author of the dissatisfied bourgeoisie. His perceptive pen clarifies their bewilderment and prejudices.' Bourgeois will be bourgeois.

Auden's first play, *Paid on Both Sides*, combined sophisticated superiorities with the wild enthusiasms of adolescence, and so appealed to a wide range of people, from poetry-lovers to those with boy-scout complexes. *The Dance of Death*, which followed, had a more specialized neurotic theme. The appearance of Karl Marx as a *deus ex machina* for the final curtain shows that Auden has by this time unmistakably begun to exploit bourgeois political 'bewilderment'. Next there appeared *The Dog beneath the Skin*, a loose construction of sketches rather than a play, in which he, and his collaborator Christopher Isherwood, play the flattering game with their audience of attacking them for prejudices which by now they no longer have. In *The Ascent of F6*, Auden and Isherwood lead their followers further up the difficult track of their conversion—to deliver them back at the end of the ascent, by way of bourgeois relaxation, to their mother-love complexes. One of the climbers symbolically jumps off the mountain to his death—as if in warning of the mountain-sickness that besets weak heads on the Marxian midden.

Stephen Spender's play, *Trial of a Judge*, was produced at the Unity Theatre Club in March, 1938. The Judge, a Liberal in politics, sentences three Fascists to death for murdering a Jew. Before the sentence is carried out the Fascists come to power; the murderers are released, and the Judge imprisoned and executed.

This is, in fact, a story of what happens in a country when the majority of the people (or a powerful minority) turn Something—and thus could be adopted by any extreme party. The Communist twist to the play is the argument: 'the only way to prevent people from turning Fascist is to make them Communist'—then there would be no need for this cruel play. A kinder one could be produced, with a non-Communist victim.

The Judge, however, who is the central figure in the play, is not really meant to represent the law. In Communist theory, justice is merely the legalization of political judgements; a judge in a non-Communist regime is either politically vicious or, if he is 'intelligent', ineffective because his politics and the State's are not the same. In this play the Judge may be taken to represent Mr. Everyman—a butt for contending Communist and Fascist views. It is Mr. Everyman who is the most to blame: the unknown quantity that requires more patience than there is in politics. (Fascist domination becomes, for the purposes of Stephen Spender's play, 'Fate': all dramatic forces must be thus simplified when politics take the stage, just as all moral notions—the law, for example—are reduced to political cant when politics and life are made identical.)

The contending views are put into the mouths of two choruses. One chorus speaks the poetry of Communism, which is, *a priori*, good poetry—the audience knows that the author has Communist sympathies and that his Communist passages must therefore contain his best work. The other chorus puts the case for Fascism in bad—*i.e.* Fascist—poetry. When I<sup>1</sup> saw the play a member of the audience, himself a Left, remarked that in his view the Fascist case was stated more forcefully than the Communist one—which perhaps only meant that he was tired of hearing the Communist case. The remark at any rate indicates the problem of honesty with which the Left dramatist is faced—and which must be solved by dishonesty if a play is to be politically successful. Another member of the audience, an Armenian, said he thought Stephen Spender had probably written the play for Eastern peoples, who like long speeches.

The Left producer's only other source of plays at

<sup>1</sup> H. K.

present is the Soviet Union, where drastic scene-shifting has been going on. During the Civil War plays were presented with a set *dramatis personae*: the Red Army Man, the White Officer, the Peasant Partisan, the Priest, the Factory Worker, and the Communist Organizer. A story is told of a company touring Eastern Russia in this period which played *The Death of Koltchak* in Red territory, *Lenin the Human Monster* in White, and *Napoleon and Josephine* when they were unsure. The position seems to have been comparable with the three stock sets in old-fashioned melodrama—a rich interior, a poor interior, and a country set. Later, as Left opinion got the upper hand, plays of Socialist construction became the rule everywhere. These remained schematic, the Sabotaging Engineer and the Kulak replacing the bad characters of the earlier plays.

By 1933 the Soviet Problem Play had been introduced. This was based either upon a Trotskyist or Anarchist conflict within the Communist Party, or upon some general problem of Soviet life. Of the latter kind, which had somewhat the larger appeal, *The Flowery Way*, by Katieff, is typical. It is about a Communist dreamer who wears out his wife with political talk. He leaves her for another woman; when she, in turn, is worn out, he leaves her for a third. Finally he returns to his wife, only to find that she has gone off with some one else. The moral is: to be a good Communist, you must convert your wife without boring her. The play starts with a Communist who bores women with his political opinions, and finishes up with his having no one at the moment to bore. He does not change in any significant way during the play—he only gets more boring; nothing unforeseen happens to him, nothing happens to anybody. The plot element is, in fact, almost entirely eliminated.

Pogodin's *Aristocrats*, which has been produced in translation by English Lefts, is described by Basil Wright as 'the highspot of the Fifth Soviet Theatre Festival'.

The play is sincere, human stuff, with a cast of over forty. It is about a labour camp during the building of the White Sea Canal. Here are drafted the criminals, prostitutes and general riff-raff, together with the respectable engineers and designers who have turned wreckers or saboteurs. The plot is merely the reformation of their characters, and ends of course with speeches saying how glad they are to have become good Bolsheviks. (*Left Review*, November, 1937.)

As in Katieff's play, the chief dramatic activity is political talk : with the difference of its being stimulating rather than boring—or the objects of attack being less resistant than the women of Katieff's play. There is no character with whom you could sympathize, and only the convinced Communist could say that they became more sympathetic as a result of their becoming more sympathetic to Communism. The play is said to illustrate the Soviet's healthy and constructive treatment of crime. In the U.S.S.R. no one is a criminal who is a good Communist ; there is, indeed, no such thing as crime—only treason, not being a good Communist.

The Moscow Theatre public, so Mr. Wright says, is an enthusiastic but uneducated one, 'equally avid for *Madame Butterfly*, *The Snow Maiden*, *Eugène Onegin*, Ballet, or (regrettably) *Quiet Flows the Don*, a Soviet opera of unparalleled banality bedewed with every kind of musical cliché.' The more sophisticated Western Left must take the view : 'something will grow out of all this'. (Let us pray that it does not). The Soviets have left the Ballet untouched—it would be impossible to revise the Ballet without taste. But there is apparently very little Communist opera, and there has been a ban on classical opera except of the non-committal Glinka



faery-story type. Bourgeois opera is broadcast, but only on foreign wave-lengths.

Before Western plays are produced in Moscow they are first 'adapted'. Mr. Wright saw Rapoport's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Vakhtangov Theatre which was 'not especially recognizable as Shakespeare'; and *Hamlet* has been organically re-interpreted to bring out contemporary economic influences, with Hamlet as the introspective intellectual vacillating between feudal reaction and bourgeois revolution. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn* were presented recently in Moscow. Tom and Huck were played by women who tried to give the literary flavour of Mark Twain by speaking Russian with a Missouri accent. Paw Finn, Huck's father, was made the murderer of Dr. Robinson, who was presented as a proletarian martyr. Moscow reviewers, it is said, 'detected a more realistic picture of the social structure and prejudices of the American South than Mark Twain intended to give.' It should be recalled that Mark Twain, in an introductory note to *Huckleberry Finn*, wrote :

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted ; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished ; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot. (By order of the Author ; per G. G., Chief of Ordnance).

There is a considerable amount of interesting technical innovation in the Russian theatre, which is described by Left critics as 'the breaking down of the fourth wall convention'. Okhlopkov, a leading innovator, has abolished the permanent stage, and constructs light platforms as required by each play. For *Mother*, by Gorki, he sets the main platform in the centre of the auditorium, with the audience sitting round it, and

another stage encircling them. For Pogodin's *Aristocrats*, the audience is grouped round a figure '8'; there is no scenery, and simple lighting is used to pick out figures on either or both of the loops. This is said to show a healthy revolutionary attitude to the theatre, and is supposed to help the audience to 'participate'. But such energetic technical experiments in stagecraft only emphasize the pitiful decline in drama itself that occurs when plays become politics. God or Marx knows that on the 'Capitalist' stage little enough is being produced that is first-rate drama. At least there is much excellent second-rate drama—the bourgeois have not lost their sense of what a play is. But third-rate political diatribes do not make even third-rate drama.

## *Left Education*

THE PARENT OR TEACHER with modern views on education is, generally speaking, concerned with making education more 'humane'. He opposes wasteful or gross forms of punishment, self-discipline in his view being more effective and morally constructive. Too much stress, he may say, has in the past been laid upon the value of organized games ; instead, he demands greater freedom for independent activity, more leisure for such occupations as music, dancing, play-acting, reading and discussion. He criticizes the examination system for its inflexibility, and would like to get rid of mark lists and dull syllabuses. Whatever his criticisms may be, they are generally aimed at making education more and not less liberal in spirit.

The Left critic of education has no basic moral sympathy of this kind with the child, but merely a Marxist determination to train opposition to Capitalism. He does not, in fact, view education from the inside, but as an economic and political instrument of a hated class—he makes wide condemnations of 'the bourgeois system of education', of the imperialist influence and 'class character' of public schools and universities.

Education is so unblushingly coveted as a social ladder that we have come primarily to regard it as a cultivation of individual qualities, divorced from social purposes, and degree-hunting is only despised by those who have sufficient social position without it (*Soviet Russia and the World*, by Maurice Dobb, M.A., Sidgwick and Jackson, 1932).

The main advantage of a Communist system of life seems to be that the social climber is left with nothing to climb : when all liberal education (‘ the cultivation of individual qualities ’) is a thing of the past, and the training of the mass-mind takes its place, there will be no prestige in being educated left to attract the degree-hunter.

Mr. Rex Warner, in an essay on education,<sup>1</sup> charges Capitalism with having no further use for ‘ culture ’, that is, with being unable to provide jobs for all the people who receive expert training as scholars, scientists and technicians ; and with being unable to keep up the Victorian’s sentimental belief in ‘ culture and progress ’. ‘ The working-class has now become the guardians<sup>2</sup> of culture ’—which can only be saved by revolution. But, the majority of people look upon Communists as immoral ; when Communists (or the working-classes ?) have educated the majority to their immoral point of view, they cease to be immoral, and ‘ those who fight desperately to maintain the old order are forced into “ immoral ” and “ uncivilized ” methods in their defence ’ :

While at first they [the Communists] had to defend themselves by reason—a more fluid medium than morality, and easier to deal with—now the ordinary standards of morality begin to pass over to their side. They still are revolutionaries, but more and more people begin to realize that they are ‘ evolutionaries ’ too . . . and it is at this stage of history that we are living to-day.

When Communists use such terms as progress and culture, they grow confused. The Left educationalist’s use of the term ‘ Capitalist system ’ is all-inclusive : Communist condemnation of the capitalist economic system is supposed to apply equally well to education ‘ under Capitalism ’, though education is not an economic

<sup>1</sup> *The Mind in Chains*, edited by C. Day Lewis, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> *Sic.*

system. When the Left educationalist reflects that there has actually been considerable progress in education since, say, Victorian times, he is faced by a contradiction in Communist argument; and avoids the contradiction by becoming, for the occasion, an 'evolutionary' revolutionary. Clearly, education 'under Capitalism' can be criticized on moral grounds, or on educational grounds, but not on economic grounds. The Communist use of the term 'economic grounds' is also all-inclusive; and, as Mr. Warner's essay shows, Communists exhibit extreme moral uncertainty when faced by problems outside the economic range of problems. Since very often, as in Mr. Warner's case, you cannot blame this on a lack of education, you have to blame it on Communism.

Mr. Warner goes on to say that 'one need not be a Marxist, one need only be an ordinarily decent person to approve the immediate aims of Marxism.' But, 'we must encourage the study of Marxism in education' because, although 'it is true that common sense and ordinary morality are coming over to our side, . . . to understand this process some knowledge of Marxism and the dialectic method is necessary.' In Marxism, morality itself means 'coming over to our side': the ordinarily decent person is not really moral until he does—he is just decent. Essentially, this means that a great many nets are put out to catch him: in this catching process is concentrated all the moral show of Communism. But when he is caught he understands that Marxism saves him from the moral effort of being ordinarily decent: he is just ordinary.

Suppose that our system of education were remodelled on Marxist lines: where would moral training come in? Marxism dispenses not merely with the various moralities of the past: it dispenses with the notion of

morality itself. Economics takes the place of morality ; and politics, the place of decency.

In Russia a violent atheist such as Yaroslavsky is given official support, but the membership of the anti-God leagues is decreasing, and priests are now allowed to vote though not to hold office. This is comparable with Communist practice in capitalist countries, where the support of religious people is sought on political questions while attacks on religion are made in Communist official literature. Marxism does not offer anything to replace the moral elements in religious training except political conviction, which is too impersonal a code to serve anything but political strategy. English children, religiously brought up, are not expected to worship God all the time, but it is assumed that they understand the importance of good behaviour ; whereas Soviet children are expected to observe political ritual all the time, even in play-time, this being held equivalent to good behaviour.

Patriotism is an important theme in European education. Mr. Warner says :

Devoted and uncritical service to British imperialism no longer commends itself to the best and most sincere minds as an ideal for life. Yet it is some such ideal the adolescent requires if he is to benefit from the maths and history and Latin which he learns.

Mr. Warner evidently took Speech Day very seriously when he was an adolescent ; but it is surely not impossible to distinguish patriotism, the love of one's country and countrymen, from Speech Day jargon—unless you do not wish to, for political reasons. One agrees with him that imperialist rhetoric is not educationally sound. But is the rhetoric of 'our far-flung empire' any less real an educational impetus than the rhetoric of Soviet Russia's 'holy frontiers', or Hitler Germany's 'bleeding boundaries' ? When the

non-political modern teacher speaks of patriotism, he means something more personal and less old-fashioned. In his essay on education Mr. Warner demonstrates his preference for Soviet Russia's 'holy frontiers', but he does not say anything timely about patriotism from the point of view of education.

A common Left criticism of education in the capitalist countries is that the history-teaching is biased. Elementary history-teaching is naturally simplified—Marxists should hardly object to that—by making a few facts carry the main weight of the story. The Marxist takes an economic view of history; his whole view of history is a simplification, remaining so even when a large number of facts is 'interpreted'. The non-Marxist historian takes a generally critical view of history: historical criticism to him includes military, political, moral, and social as well as economic factors. Thus, his kind of history is more interesting as well as better informed than Marxist history. Marxists are afraid, presumably, that children will like some of the kings and queens, nobles, courtiers, generals, and prelates they read about; for, according to Marxist history, they were all essentially bad—not Communistic. An exception is made in Russia, it seems, of Peter the Great, because he allowed what are considered to be significant 'concessions to the masses'. But, in general, nothing except prochronistic revolt is admired in the unredeemed years B.C. (Before Communism). History, of course, is a favourite Marxist subject: all writing of the past from which a picture of contemporary political structure and opinion can be adduced may be valuable as history, if it is not valuable as economics—if it is neither, it is useless. In a Communist school, for example, you might find the classes discussing the works of Jane Austen or Anthony Trollope, and jump to the con-

clusion that Communist children did after all get a liberal education ; but if you lingered in the class you would soon realize that they were being taught to read them as social history, not as novels.

The Left educationalist has no sympathy for the ' useless ' subject. Mr. C. Day Lewis, in an essay called *An Expensive Education*, writes :

The clientele of the average preparatory school (and public school) is more or less saturated with the capitalist mentality ; it is inevitable, therefore, that the training of such schools should be fundamentally directed towards the maintenance of the capitalist system. For this, Latin—with its emphasis on syntax, its constant appeal to the past, its abstraction from contemporary issues, its combination of intellectual snobbery and imagination-deadening drudgery—may well be the most effective ' mental discipline ' (From the *Left Review*, February 1937).

If you object to your son's learning Latin on the ground that it is unproductive, the practical thing is to arrange for him to learn Italian or Spanish instead. He will then be studying a modern derivative of Latin, but excluding from his study, for practical reasons, an important element in the history of language : namely, Latin. Day Lewis, however, claims that the exclusion of Latin is imperative because it is a politically harmful element in education. Getting rid of Latin is somehow, in Day Lewis's mind, like getting rid of Capitalism. Caesar and Livy and Catullus, *mehercle*, cannot now be argued into talking Marxian dialectics ; and there is no point in putting Marxian dialectics into Latin elegiacs since no one now argues in Latin. Therefore, we are expected to pity the poor miseducated Left literary man who spent his youth learning ' dead ' (i.e. bourgeois) languages.

In Left education Marxian dialectics is not a subject in which you specialize : it is supposed to permeate all



subjects. Marxist training, in fact, trains for nothing but Marxism. It is always : the Marxist use of this or that. Soviet children are taught to spend a great deal of time on political activity ; twenty-five thousand children were actually mobilized in Moscow alone to canvass in the recent elections—which shows what happens to homework in a Marxist system of education.

Education in Russia has a strong technological bias. Mr. R. D. Charques says <sup>1</sup> that in 1932 a special government department was established to develop a ' technological psychology ' in the nursery schools and kindergartens. Madame Krupskaya abolished all ' children's songs about birds and rabbits ' and expressed her determination to supplant all fairy tales with ' dialectic materialism for children '. The influence of the technological theme is assured between the ages of eight and fifteen (the period of secondary education) by placing the school under the patronage of the local factory.

Mr. Charques gives several examples : one of a school attached to a margarine factory, where, as part of the curriculum, the children are taught the story of Soviet margarine, and the history of the Soviet margarine workers' Trade Union. At another school, under the patronage of *Izvestia*, the children are familiarized with the processes of printing and binding. In a school attached to a Collective farm the children are taught agriculture and the history of the Sovkhoz.

In English secondary schools children are taken to see factories, railway depots and telephone exchanges in their neighbourhood ; they are also taken to the Zoo, to places of archaeological and historical interest, and to cricket matches. Occasionally a somewhat sinister note creeps into the industrial visit—the note of ' fitting one

<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Education*. Day to Day Pamphlets, No. 12. Hogarth Press, 1932.

for a job'. In Russia the position is rather more sinister since the State owns the factories as well as the schools : economic values therefore tend to be imposed much more ruthlessly upon educational values, and the curricula are much more obviously designed with an eye to fitting children for jobs.

Mr. Charques admits that in Soviet education the element of fun tends to be eliminated. Text-books are full of Marxist phraseology—so much so that at one stage a warning had to be issued that the three R's were still the first consideration in elementary education.

It is interesting to compare the original decrees of the Lenin State with the Stalin State's *Decree of Academic Reform*, of September 4th 1935.

*Lenin State* : Pupils of the older classes in the secondary schools must not, dare not, consider themselves children and govern their destiny to suit the wishes of parents and teachers. . . . Utilization of a system of marks for estimating the knowledge and conduct of the pupil is abolished. . . . Distribution of medals and insignia is abolished. . . . The old form of (Tzarist) discipline which corrupts the entire life of the school and the untrammelled development of the personality of the child, cannot be maintained in the schools of Labour. The process of labour itself develops this internal discipline without which collective and rational work is unimaginable. . . . All punishment in school is forbidden. . . . All examinations—entrance, grade and graduation—are abolished. . . . The wearing of school uniforms is abolished.

*Stalin State* : Instruct a commission . . . to elaborate a draft of a ruling for every type of school. The ruling must have a categorical and absolutely obligatory character for pupils as well as for teachers. This ruling must be the fundamental document . . . which strictly establishes the regime of studies and the basis for order in the school as well as for the rules of conduct for pupils inside and outside of school. . . . Introduce in all schools a uniform type of pupils' report card

on which all the principal rules for the conduct of the pupil are to be inscribed. Establish a personal record for every pupil. . . . Every five days the chief instructor of a class will examine the memorandum, will mark the cases of absence and tardiness in it, and will demand the signature of the parent under all remarks of the instructor. . . . Underlying the ruling on the conduct of the pupils is to be placed a strict and conscientious application of discipline. . . . In the personal record there will be entered for the entire duration of his studies the marks of the pupil for every quarter, his prizes and his punishments. . . . A special apparatus of Communist Youth organizers is to be installed for the surveillance of the pupils inside and outside of school. They are to watch over the morality and the state of mind of the pupils. . . . Establish a single form of dress for pupils of the primary, semi-secondary, and secondary schools, this uniform to be introduced to begin with, in 1936, in the schools of Moscow. . . .

Lenin, apparently, held old Socialist views on education, formed during contact with advanced educationalist opinion in pre-Soviet Russia and abroad. There was much of the old Socialist in Lenin, in his moral as well as educational views—he confined his Marxism to politics, economics and philosophy. Indeed, Stalin's term 'Leninism' for the Russian Communism of to-day is in some ways unfair on Lenin, as can be seen from a comparison of the foregoing views on education. Lenin died too soon after the revolution to have had a lasting influence on Soviet education—the 'Leninists' meanwhile have brought back all the old-fashioned red tape that Lenin wanted to get rid of.

What is education for? The stock reply is—for life. This means that education should fit you for working and living among other people; enable you to become a good member of society. But in Left life 'society' means the Party, and education means instilling in the young the ambition of serving the Party.

*SECTION FOUR*  
**THE WITHERING AWAY**



*Compensations and Virtues*

WE MUST DISTINGUISH between two types of Left people: the working-class Left who accepts Socialist or Communist views with the object of assuring new material benefits to himself and his class; and the Left who embraces Socialism or Communism as 'a way of life'. A person of the first type can be regarded as little different from any worker with strong views on the subject of his rights and the proper methods of obtaining them. He has, in fact, only adapted a political language to his material interests; he has not adapted his whole being to a general Socialist or Communist outlook. The only examination pertinent to his case would be: whether his politics procured and maintained better material conditions of life for his class than the non-revolutionary methods of Trade Unions, parliamentary legislation, and so on.

The other type of Left is not concerned primarily with material grievances; that is, not primarily on his own account, though he uses them as a make-weight for his own kind of grievance—which is philosophic in emphasis. The worker-Lefts accept him as one of them because it is 'inspiring' to have social or intellectual superiors 'genuinely interested' in their drab grievances and struggles. Our blue-blooded Left would insist, however, that Communism possessed advantages as an all-inclusive system of life. In this chapter we shall consider: what are these advantages

from his point of view, and whether they compensate for the shortcomings of Communism.

It is to be noted that Communism represents a more tightly integrated social philosophy than Socialism ; its obdurate structure of argument is an 'absolute', whereas the Socialist argument is a comparatively flexible instrument of social criticism. For this reason many worker-Communists must be included as Lefts of the second type : it is difficult, for the worker as for any one else, to hold Communist views on economic issues alone, since Communist economic values are given the philosophic force of general values. We might call those who embrace the Communist faith in this wider sense 2-R Communists—Reading and Writing Communists, as opposed to the 1-R Practical Arithmetic Communists.

A 2-R Communist would say that in becoming a Communist you enjoyed the advantage of a sharp sophistication, a modernism safe from the ravages of time. Communism, however, allows you only a very one-sided sophistication : you are set a metropolitan standard of mental alertness, but confined to the emotional range of a medieval peasant. If you are as complex emotionally as you are astute mentally, you run the risk of being put down as a bourgeois. You must be sharp, but you may not be 'sensitive'. Your scope of comment must be universal, but your scope of emotional interest must be repressively rather than expansively modern.

For example, you are allowed to be interested in the laws governing physical phenomena, but any personal intuition of their symbolic significance is held to be as reactionary as an interest in alchemy ; and poetry or art as such, without Communist prophylactics, is viewed as a form of witchcraft. If a Com-

munist is accused of being a narrow-minded materialist he has cynical epithets ready for the counter-attack, that are intended to shame his critic out of his dark-age views. Anything that does not yield to Communist explanation you are expected to regard as an old-fashioned delusion. Communism and popular modernism employ a similar method of attack—the attack of young disrespect. Yet Communists like to be regarded as more grown-up than other people—while claiming the privileges of youth.

Our 2-R Left would say that, thanks to his Communist outlook, he could not be easily fooled by anything. He would claim, for example, that his views enabled him to see through such national pomps and vanities as Jubilees and Coronations. No intelligent person is misled into a view of Coronation pageantry as a presage of dark-age revivals. But the supposedly intelligent Left sees sinister forces lurking everywhere—which naturally weakens his power of distinguishing what is really sinister, since he confuses the innocent with the dangerous survival.

Mr. John Strachey, in a *Daily Worker* article ('Two Nations at the Coronation,' 12/5/37), contrasts the official celebration in the West End ('It is utterly unspontaneous . . . empty, without significance one way or the other') with the back-street teas and bunting in the poorer areas ('though they have now been taken up and patronized and, in some cases, directed from above, they were undoubtedly spontaneous and genuine in origin').

The street has suddenly been discovered by the workers as a place in which they can get together. That terrible isolation, that 'deadly' keeping of oneself to oneself, that extreme individualism, which has been the curse of so much of British working-class life, which has done so much to



retard the development of the British Labour movement, has been broken down. The cups and saucers, the tables and chairs, the household goods, are to-day being brought out into the streets. For an hour or so the street will live in brotherhood, a common life. . . . To-day millions of people are meeting their neighbours and joining with them in a common activity. May they not, now that they have met them, go on from giving the children a Coronation Tea to other activities? May not the street, once having become conscious of itself, find that it has needs and aspirations which it needs common action to satisfy?

He wants the street tea, in fact, to be communistically developed—directed from below—to sinister and unspontaneous proportions, as a weapon against the sinister pageantry that originally inspired it. A public so organized would rise to every public occasion with a common shout: 'We are not fooled!' And Communism would have served the need of the people not to be fooled. But—are they fooled? Or—is it not one of their needs to be fooled occasionally, and charmingly? And does not Communism frequently fool them with pageantries of its own—less charmingly staged?

Left people, it could be said, are not easily deceived by press lies or dishonest books. On the other hand, they are condemned to pay attention to many things bearing the Left stamp that a person of educated tastes would reject—concerts, plays, newspapers, magazines and books of inferior quality. If you are a Left you cannot just ignore these things as inferior, you have to feel responsible for their inferiority. A Left must be willing to waste time on anything Left: and is thus victim of any parasitic production that chooses to place itself under Left auspices.

Communists regard themselves as educators of public opinion—by which they mean 'the masses'. But the masses are admittedly ignorant; Communism must

therefore be adapted to their ignorance. Yet, at the same time, it must be sufficient for intelligent people. So a certain amount of diseducation of the intelligent people must be done : Communist book clubs are for these, rather than for the masses.

Another advantage of Communism is that it makes it easy for you to be an internationalist. You don't have to travel painstakingly to other countries to learn their customs, manners and language in the ordinary way ; you come to 'feel' international by reading political literature and attending political meetings. The emotional Esperanto which the Communist picks up during his political globe-trotting is useful for his politics, but not for his travel in or understanding of foreign countries—like Esperanto, it is only valuable among Esperantists.

The Communist would maintain that, whatever else one might say about him, he was doing his bit to help other people. But if one looks closely at Communist life, one finds that most of this good-neighbour energy goes into building up the Party. The Party in turn is assumed to have mystical relations with Humanity, and so through it you are supposed to be in touch with your neighbour (whom you probably despise for not being a Communist). The writer who doubts whether he is 'doing any good' with his work feels, as a Party member, that he is at least being politically effective. He would perhaps say : 'Look at Russia !' Is he then only interested in the political happiness of the Russians ? Are the Russians politically happy ? What constructive works can the Communists of other countries point to except the building up of the Party ?

If Communists could be brought to admit certain grave disadvantages in being Communist, they might reasonably insist that Communism offered compensation for

these in the good influence it has on character. Let us examine the special Communist virtues.

If we list the virtues ascribed to Stalin in a eulogy addressed to him by the Executive Committee of the Communist International on the eve of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Russian revolution, we find that the two virtues most repeatedly mentioned or implied are *bravery* and *steadfastness*.<sup>1</sup> Communists are brave—we can say this much for them ; it needs physical courage, for example, to fight voluntarily in armed battles for Communist reasons—more courage than when the reasons are patriotic, since the war-emotions must be rationally induced. Moral courage, however, is the less a Communist virtue as Communist values limit the significance of morality to political significance. A Communist, for example, could be said to show conventional moral courage in facing personal persecution for his opinions ; but he would make no distinction himself between this and the courage of fighting battles to advance the Communist cause—nor, essentially, can we, Communist courage being no more than the courage to endure physical suffering for Communism. The complement of Communist courage is Communist stead-

<sup>1</sup> The complete list of virtues officially ascribed to Stalin is indicated in the following summary of the article (*Daily Worker*, 5/11/37) :

Indeparable friend and brother-in-arms of the eternal Lenin . . . underground conditions of Tsarism . . . tireless in building that splendid Party . . . teaching courage to every Bolshevik . . . personal example of steadfastness . . . iron will . . . daring and relentless in dealing blows at the enemy . . . menaced by danger . . . you ORGANIZED the victory . . . under the fire of the enemy, you re-organized regiments . . . firm hand of a tried and tested helmsman . . . inexorable . . . irreconcilable struggle for the purity of the ranks of the Party . . . steadfastly carrying through the Five-Year Plans . . . developing and adding to the teachings of Marx—Engels—Lenin.

fastness : loyalty to Communism during 'peaceful' periods is impossible without dogged patience—without the ability to endure the muddle and dullness of 'Party work'.

What moral effect does turning Communist have on any one ? The 2-R Communist would probably reply : 'I don't "pretend" any more. I don't have snob affectations about "beauty", "art", "literature", "love". I don't pretend to be such a self-importantly introspective person. Now I care less what sort of friends I make, I care less about my personal problems. I let propaganda work liquidate the strain of trying to stabilize my social relations with people.' What has really happened is that he has given up self-criticism. The Communist does not criticize himself as a person ; self-criticism means for him 'criticism of my political mistakes'. He might say of himself : 'I am not so easily influenced now—I don't make compromises any more.' But by that he would mean that he bothered less about the feelings and views of others.

An adjective which Communists use very often in speaking about themselves in a complimentary way is—'simple'. What implications of being 'simple' can we apply to Communists that they would regard as compliments ? It can be said that Communists have simple tastes. Simplicity in this sense would mean economy of energy in the personal details of life. Communists are lazy about their appearance and manners, as they would admit ; but they would say that this did not matter—they were saving their energy for politics. Much Communist writing exhibits a lack of grace which might be called simplicity, but for which a more accurate description would be lack of affection—without which, indeed, simplicity is not endearing. Communist writing is intended to be simple to understand—and should there-

fore have the appeal of forthrightness. But the more purely Communistic writing is, the more gracelessly complex its structure and repellent its style. To be simple in the Communist sense means no more than to be deliberately insensitive to the sensibilities of others.

What are the Communist standards of friendship? Theoretically, such feelings as friendliness toward other people, compassion for the poor, love of one's country, are provided for in Communism. But in practice a great deal of hating goes on. Thus, the Communist must hate the Capitalists who exploit the masses—for their shrewdness; on the other hand, he must hate the non-Communist mass for its stupidity. Who is there left to be friends with? Only Party members, and *all* Soviet citizens; and prospective Party members according to their susceptibility to Communist doctrine. In an earlier chapter reference was made to Communist feelings of vengeance and to Mr. R. Osborn's parallel between the Communist outlook and the *Œdipus* complex. Marxists, he showed, could be described as people determined to have vengeance on capitalist father-symbols. It is significant that in the preface to Mr. Osborn's book, which was written by a Communist, no exception was taken to this reflexion on the Marxist character.

Communists speak frequently of 'the wise guidance of comrade Stalin'. Are Communists really wise? Do they become wise under the guidance of comrade Stalin? The fully developed Communist is 'experienced' in the technical sense only—in the sense that you might say a stockbroker or a Borough Councillor was experienced. As a Communist a person can become shrewd in dealing with non-Communists, and in winning arguments for Communism.

In listing the virtues which, it could be claimed,

Communism fostered, it is difficult to discover any that are pleasant in their own right. The Communist is not necessarily one who lacks endearing virtues ; but Communism uses virtues in a way that makes them unattractive. For example, generosity. Communists give generously to *Daily Worker* or *National Relief* funds, but the spirit of generosity behind these contributions is tainted with opinionatedness—has, in fact, ulterior motives. And this is true of all the aspects of the Communist character : the ulterior motive is unpleasantly near the surface. Communists on the whole are not pleasant people. The atmosphere of Communism is not pleasant. Communists would say that this was unimportant. If they really believe this, what contribution are they capable of making to the general pleasantness of life, for people as a whole ? Is this also unimportant to Communists ?

*Arise, Ye Starvelings*

IN THIS CHAPTER will appear some of the replies received to a letter sent round to a number of writers. They had all been moved by the Left political challenge, and either surrendered to it or made some compromise with it : had made public statements in which the pros and cons of the challenge were weighed, and might therefore be expected to make a clear defence of their position.

The questions asked in the letter (see p. 8) were of the kind that in other days might have been asked about religion ; and, indeed, the replies have a quality of rueful heresy. The letter was sent to professional writers because one could expect them to allow some independence to literature and to themselves ; and the questions were asked from the poet's point of view because this seemed the best guarantee against merely political or humanitarian answers.

Those who accept the Left challenge as affecting them personally apparently go through an emotional crisis at first, during which they are unable to reconcile their former loyalties with the new. The prostration that follows is a sort of modern equivalent of the medieval condition of 'accidie'. The behaviour of people in this condition seems to be compelled by a power outside their control. In other days such a foreign influence would have been described as mystical or diabolical. It is customary to regard people possessed by Left politics as quite normal in their thought-processes, and the

rationalistic quality of Left argument encourages this view ; but behind all the argument and self-revelation there is another quality—as of minds succumbing to some irresistible pressure, difficult to define.

The following *Notes* were sent in reply to my letter by Naomi Mitchison :

This is an extraordinarily uncomfortable time in history in which to be a poet. Poetry so far has been about the individual experience (of course also universal perceived through individual and because in solitude). At present the individual experience appears largely without worth, and the individual himself or herself without the possibility of affecting the world. The sense of individual worthwhileness can now only be found in a small and isolated community—such as a school : note how many modern poets are schoolmasters, or in deliberate retirement, which gets more and more artificial every year.

The world movements of which any social being must be aware tend to diminish the individual. Fascism in all its forms does so deliberately, since in its philosophy, the individual is never considered as an end but only as a means to some end beyond him, usually thought of as the State. Communism does so temporarily, during the ' dictatorship ' phase, although its ultimate aim is the treatment of individuals as ends in themselves and in a free relationship such as cannot exist under capitalism. It is, therefore, full of hope, and likely to produce poetry in so far as it can relax its grip on the instrument of that poetry. But too often at present that grip is apparent. The other main political pattern of the epoch, Liberalism, is so bound up with the principle of competition that poetry cannot flourish in it : poetry is essentially a giving-out and its standards cannot be the money standards alone appropriate to Liberalism.

I am for the sake of simplicity not distinguishing between Socialism and Communism ; there is an important political and social distinction between them (I am a Socialist), but very little from the point of view of poetry. Nor are their ultimate ends distinguishable.

The other main difficulty at present is that poetry (as



opposed to folk-song, ballad, ironic verse, etc.) must come from experience apprehended, either directly or indirectly, and then allowed to settle into form. Just now there is any amount of experience going especially for those who take Left political action—and direct experience of the most vivid and absorbing kind is very possible—but little leisure and calm in which the apprehension can settle. We have event-clouded minds, and we are obsessed by the idea of hurrying time and urgent necessity for action.

The poet has social responsibilities just as much as any other able-minded citizen. If he is sufficiently good, it is possible that some authority should be able to step in and say that he must be relieved of irksome and dangerous responsibilities. But this is merely theory. If his social responsibilities appear to mean also political and party responsibilities, then he must take them as well; nor must he or she shirk the basic family responsibilities if in a position to take them on.

Poets are presumably people in whom sensitivities and pattern-making instincts and talents are above normal. It is likely that their social sensitivities should be strong—equally, they tend to be discouraged rather easily and for this reason they may be well-advised to join a group, political or otherwise, which will hearten them in the times of distress and discouragement. It is often helpful that such a group should be composed of persons different from themselves, both in mental and physical habits, especially of persons with more or less fixed manual occupations. They must, however, have a certain degree of sympathy with the poet, and so, a certain abnormal amount of sensitivity and intelligence. Such persons among the class of manual workers would normally be found in the Labour Party, Communist Party or I.L.P. An alternative would be the society of another kind of person whose employment is mainly physical, for instance, fox-hunters, and the type of skilled agricultural labourer whose interests are mainly with the possessing classes, and who would probably not be politically active. I think it is possible that one or two excellent poets may at the moment be getting the same kind of inspiration from that group as certain of their fellow-poets are getting from

Party contacts. But this type of group is doomed to extinction if capitalism works itself out logically ; nor does it at present exist in highly capitalised localities.

Mrs. Mitchison here confesses to feeling a pressure of some kind which is getting into 'individual experience'—that is, individual emotions—with the result that personal life becomes difficult and uncomfortable. This is the pressure, apparently, of distressing conditions prevailing all around one, of the kind that Left political action is designed to remedy. But one could also call it the pressure of the mass on the individual person—making him feel guilty for being an individual. He now feels that he must 'affect the world'—come to terms with the mass in some way. Communism offers a way of placating the mass, doing penance for being an individual, and at the same time helps to 'diminish' the importance of individual responsibility by training one to rely more and more on the mass. The pressure is most acutely felt when transmitted by the Communist lever ; and people who are mere Socialists still feel somewhat guilty for not being Communists—for not yielding utterly to the pressure of mass-problems.

Why are the Communists able to exert this power of provoking guilt-feelings towards the mass ? Because they skilfully identify blame for unsatisfactory social conditions with moral dissatisfaction of a kind that sensitive people feel with their own achievements. Mrs. Mitchison says that 'individual experience appears largely without worth, and the individual himself or herself without the possibility of affecting the world.' This blurring of public with private woe shifts the private solution to a public plane. Socialism, because of its sentimentalism, never dared to go so far ; and Left-minded writers who, like Mrs. Mitchison, take a sentimental view of themselves, generally hesitate to go the

whole way with Communism. Communism persuades the individual to despair of his ever achieving personal success with things as they are : the equation between personal and political dissatisfaction being a necessary preliminary to a faith in the political solution as all-solving. For writers the appeal is assumed to have a special attraction, in taking the weary mind back to simpler stages of thought and expression. For example, if it is laid down that, before large poetic problems are studied, the problem of earthquakes should first be solved, one does not need to work so hard at poetry. That is common sense : of what good is all our truth-seeking so long as earthquakes are out of control and no fixed, comforting attitude to them has been formulated ?

Mr Christopher Isherwood offered to discuss his views in person, instead of making a written reply to the letter. To explain his position he told the story of his own conversion to Communism.<sup>1</sup> The essence of the story is perhaps best given in his own words—in this paragraph from his autobiography, *Lions and Shadows*. He is describing his feelings about the people he saw holiday-making during a visit to the Isle of Wight.

But beneath all my note-taking, my would-be scientific detachment, my hatred, my disgust, there was the old sense of exclusion, the familiar grudging envy. For, however I might sneer, these people *were* evidently enjoying themselves in their own mysterious fashion, and why was it so mysterious to me ? . . . Why couldn't I—the would-be novelist, the professional observer, understand them ? Why didn't I know—not coldly from the outside, but intuitively, sympathetically, from within—what it was that made them perform their grave ritual of pleasure ?

He is here looking back on a time when he was not a Communist, and therefore more like 'other people'—

<sup>1</sup> To H. K.

and also, perhaps, forward to the rosy Communist time when other people will be like him. Meanwhile there is this didactically honest confession of alienation from ordinary people—contradicted by his being a Communist, which means that he feels himself to have a fellow-creature's understanding of them. Does he then understand their unhappiness but not their happiness : is this the point ? But is his own unhappiness, on which he presumably bases his identity with ordinary people, really of the same stuff as theirs ? Most certainly not : the masses do not suffer from the neuroses of split-personality.

Mr. J. B. Priestley replied to the letter in the following terms :

I am sorry, but I am exceptionally busy now, and it would take far more time than I can afford to explain my position. Very briefly, my opinion is that the poet should be free to express whatever comes nearest and dearest to him. During a period of intense political conflict, like that of the seventeenth century, or the Regency, or to-day, the poet would tend to be political ; but at other more settled times he would be inspired by other themes. It is the business of the State simply to leave him alone. I believe in giving the State enormous economic power and taking away from it any other kind of power, and I think the less it interferes with culture, the better.

Mr. Priestley, then, is really on the defensive against Communism—by ' State ' here he can only mean the Communist State, since the Capitalist State's attitude to the poet is indeed ' simply to leave him alone '. But to Mr. Priestley this separation of culture from government implies respect for the writer's freedom, not social neglect. Writers who abandon themselves to topical realities have his cultural forgiveness—whether in the seventeenth century or during the Regency or in

present times. Ideally, he feels, all writers should be economically free to go the way of fancy ; therefore the State should acquire sufficient economic power to place them in this Platonic condition of exile. Mr. Priestley's Left sympathies, that is, are a form of apology to less economically successful writers for his having taken the primrose path : he would like them to be able to take up their beds and trip after him.

Mr. E. M. Forster referred to *Abinger Harvest* for his attitude, which is summarized there in the following passage :

As for my politics, you will have guessed that I am not a Fascist—Fascism does evil that evil may come. And you may have guessed that I am not a Communist, though perhaps I might be one if I was a younger and braver man, for in Communism I can see hope. (From an address to the International Writers' Congress, Paris, 1935.)

Mr. Forster admits to feeling the pressure of Communism, but pleads that he is too old for active service. His is the gentle character that likes a clean house but shrinks from doing the dirty work himself. He is, in fact, a nice, harmless person, with all the right views, but rather lazy—and therefore extremely modest. Mrs. Mitchison's complaint that ' individual experience appears largely without worth ' is echoed in this confession. We have here an example of the comfort that Left baptism affords people of good will and high principles who are conscious of not being all they might be. Having undergone the rite, the proselytes may indulge themselves in a succession of cathartic groans. Mrs. Mitchison's groan is a lusty female groan, suggesting her own vital energies rather than the woes of others. Mr. Forster's groan is of a sighing nature, the noise of a weary host sitting down by his fireside after a visit from a friend in distress. Mr. Priestley, in a similar position in

relation to the unfortunate, mutters kindly things to his dog.

Mr. C. Day Lewis referred to certain public statements and books. The following passage is taken from a pamphlet published by the *Left Review* in 1937, called *Authors Take Sides*. It is interesting as a confession, by over a hundred writers, of the welter into which the intelligence falls when it gives way under Communist pressure. Day Lewis says :

The struggle in Spain is part of a conflict going on now all over the world. I look upon it quite simply as a battle between light and darkness, of which only a blind man could be unaware. Both as a writer and as a member of the Communist Party I am bound to help in the fight against Fascism, which means certain destruction or living death for humanity.

Since Day Lewis has stated his position dramatically, let us examine the drama of it. There is an armed conflict going on which he looks upon quite simply, i.e. dramatically, as a battle between light and darkness. A blind man would not necessarily be unaware of the armed conflict, he would hear talk about it all around him. But he would not understand it as a battle between light and darkness, since he is vague about the difference between light and darkness. Day Lewis knows that the armed conflict is a battle between light and darkness, as a result of his being a writer *and* a member of the Communist Party. In other words, he is not blind because he has 'vision', and because he has vision he is able to see the armed conflict as a dramatic symbol. His being a writer makes him want vision and his being a member of the Communist Party supplies him with vision : the power to turn an armed conflict into a political symbol—and here the writer steps in again to turn the political symbol into a dramatic symbol.

*But* : here the member of the Communist Party steps in to say he must help in the armed conflict for the sake of the political symbol (the 'humanity' contexts) that the writer needs as a dramatic symbol. Take away armed conflict : no political symbol. Take away political symbol : no dramatic symbol. Take away dramatic symbol : no vision. No vision—blind man.

The existence of the Communist Party saves the writer from being a blind man, but the existence of the Communist Party depends on the supply of material out of which political symbols can be made—and they must be tragic symbols. These symbols appeal to the writer who wants vision, enabling him to dramatize tragically his own problem : can I or can I not write ; am I or am I not mentally blind ? The dramatic effect is tremendously 'honest', desperate—and almost convincing. Until we stop to ask ourselves questions : What is the subject of this drama ? An armed conflict ? A political conflict ? A poetic conflict ? Or a personal conflict ? Does our writer know the difference between this and that ? If his mind is a stage on which light and darkness battle, life and death, truth and falsity, as a writer he is indeed a tragedy. He would not be able to indulge himself in this tragic extremism if he were not a member of the Communist Party. Communism presses him to 'see'—and he enjoys the show, which makes his own mental light and darkness a symbol of more important things.

Mr. Herbert Read supplied the notes of a speech he had made in December 1936, at a meeting convened by the Christian Arts Left Group to debate the subject 'Art and Revolution'. In the course of his speech Mr. Read said : 'Although theoretically for the artist himself, in practice a work of art is created by one for

many. Society is the soil . . . the individual the seed.' He then defined revolution as a 'transformation'—'leading to full, free, and active enjoyment of the fruits of the earth and inventions of mankind. At present wealth is unjustly distributed . . . hence the force of the proletariat against capitalism is necessary. That is the struggle which we all, as Socialists, are engaged upon.' He then went on to consider the part to be played by the artist in the revolution, and rejected the view that art is above the struggle—'art that deliberately attempts to be such is dead at birth. It is not fed by any vital blood-stream; it has no contact with human beings.' He rejected Socialist realism in art, on the other hand, as an 'even more dangerous conception'—'it is an incontrovertible law of history that the moment you yoke art to an intellectual or rational ideal, it begins to die'—and concluded his speech with the following self-revelatory piece of advice :

What then ? 'Let beauty take care of itself ?' Better . . . since in a Socialist community a Socialist art will arise . . . as in the U.S.S.R.

But this moment, here ? Must we as Socialists and artists remain dumb and inactive ? Of course not.

It is permitted and it is essential that we should distinguish between the art of dead idealisms, the shells and husks of outworn creeds, and the art that is without ideals, without prejudices, that is the new and vivid shoot of simple, sensuous awareness . . . surrealism as Romanticism in art.

To sum up : let us be revolutionists in politics and art ; not by catch-words and revolutionary propaganda—what is required is more fundamental : a change of vision, a change of nature, a transformation of reality through the supreme power of the imagination. The revolution will not be made by intellectuals and political careerists, but by simple men and women moved by fiery passions, exaltation and mystical fervour, convinced that the only alternative to a life of individual freedom is the freedom of death.



In the Communist sense 'transformation' means social change—and change means radical simplification. Exciting as the political events may be that lead up to the Revolution, the ends in view are hugely humanitarian, but also hugely dull. In the Surrealist sense 'transformation' means an anarchic relaxation from conscious discipline, yielding unexpected, exciting results. It is interesting to reflect that the actual working processes in Surrealist technique must be exceedingly dull—since they are based on a disregard of the significance of their material ; and that the supposedly exciting quality of the results is no more than a quality of disorderliness.

A person who is solemnly sympathetic to Communism, or Socialism, and also to Surrealism, with the desperate, 'fundamental' importance that Mr. Read attaches to both attitudes, must be seen as confessing to a fundamental weakness of grasp upon 'reality'—upon both the social realities of modern life and the realities with which art and literature (Mr. Read's professional concerns) deal. At the bottom of Mr. Read's distaste for rationalism and intellectualism is the complaint that socially and personally life is too difficult—and must be made easier : instead of facing difficulties, we must simplify the material. Hence the romantic appeal of Surrealism : make art easier, 'free'. But it is not only society and art that are to be simplified. Reality itself is to be transformed ! Reality is to be made easier.

Reality indeed is a very hard nut to crack. Solution : to find a softer nut. And here mysticism can be useful. The mystic, by the simple exquisiteness of his sensibilities, can accomplish anything it pleases him to imagine. He can declare the hard nut to be 'really' soft ; or, in his exaltation, see the grape surrealistically growing on the nut-tree.

Communism will remove the necessity of pretending to enjoy hard work and of maintaining a complex pattern of social life ; Surrealism will soften the ardours of art and literature so that simple men and women (and babies) can be good artists and writers.

Thus the pressure of Communism on the jaded intellectual induces in him a suicidal fit of honesty about his apathy and immaturity—and at the same time fires him with new hope : why should not art and life be on a simpler level ? This wish for simplicity is really a wish for other people to cease being mature.

The following letter, headed 'To my bourgeois friends in the Communist Party', was written by a young Cambridge intellectual not long before he went to fight in Spain :

We differ about certain questions of fact and a calculus of ethics and probabilities. That, in the main, is what prevents my joining you. But let us consider your position and it may well be mine before long. You have got into a hole ; now what are you to do ?

No doubt there are emotional satisfactions : the beloved group ; fool's gold and *ignis fatuus* of enthusiasm and flags ; and the satisfactions of war—a war of attrition with second-rate generals. And, no doubt, there is an argument—even apart from Marx there is an argument. And no doubt there is righteous indignation against poverty. And finally, and at the bottom of it, you are in an infernal tangle. You can't deal with your own emotions ; nor with the world outside you.

Such, I think, are your motives : but what position are you led to ? Well, consider—it is most important and what I am really concerned with : what sort of people are you ? Not, you will hardly pretend, thumb-fingered proletarians. How many of you can handle axe or spade ? No, you are highly sophisticated, emotionally and intellectually complicated, and pretty thoroughly involved in the European tradition : you also are children of Erasmus.

Now you would be the first to say the tradition is done with ; broken with Kreuger and Toll, slumped down an infinite regress. And after your civil war both sides between you will have smashed it ; like a fused electric light bulb, wires burned out, only glass stars for lighting.

What, then, about you and your lives—perhaps, though, we may all have been killed. How do you propose to melt down, how enter into the new world ? You will always be out of the beloved group, rather suspect and irretrievably different. Perhaps something might be concocted, but far more likely not. You are not proletarians, and the proletariat is determined to get its own way. And, I gather, will rebuild its own culture, a mass culture, and inevitably Philistine and vulgarized, at least to begin with. Your exquisite complications will be incomprehensible, and extremely suspect.

For my own part, I am proposing to turn myself into a man of action, cultivate my tastes for war and intrigue, perhaps even for town-planning and machines, and generally, for organizing things and running the world.

As for poetry, I shall write it more for my own satisfaction, to please my friends, or flatter a mistress, and not bother much about publishing.

For since we have set out as individuals ; specialized, sophisticated, sceptical ; we had better intensify the process, become hard lumps in the porridge, bits of bone in the general stew.

In order to survive we shall have to act—indeed, to prove the most efficient in action. But if we are to lead lives we value, and not lumber up the revolution ; nor make ourselves miserably disillusioned ; we had better grow cynical and detached observers, and watch ourselves from the outside. The best general should be in two places at once.

The writer sees some of the incongruities of Communism for the person of educated sensibilities, but is not interested in the rights and wrongs of Communism from such a person's point of view. He is, indeed, not interested at all in justifying Communism ; is not even sympathetic with the proletariat, which he regards as having invented Communism. His acceptance of it, like

his going to fight in Spain (where he was killed), is entirely fatalistic. Communism and vulgarity will win : 'our' problem is to find the proper gesture of surrender.

But, it should be realized, the kind of person whose problem he analyses has already been defeated by the Philistines (the process began in the '90's). Communist Philistinism seems a more attractive conqueror than bourgeois Philistinism because of its greater brutality. We have here, in fact, the problem of the aesthete who has been dealt the mortal blow but is long in dying : Communism is more thorough-going and thus has a romantically masochistic appeal. The language of the letter is that of the nearly extinct aesthete ('to please my friends or flatter a mistress').

Here Communism presents itself not as a prospect of regeneration for failures, and a way of escape from suicide, but as the cleansing figure of Death itself. That such a gigantic structure must be reared to dispose finally of aestheticism seems out of proportion to the number of aesthetes—who were never either a very numerous or popular race. Communism visits upon them a *Götterdämmerung* that they could never enjoy under Capitalism.

All these replies and revelations have in common the note of self-dissatisfaction. Most good people are in some respects dissatisfied with themselves—in the sense that they keep on working to get better results, to bring about closer correspondence between their activities and their intentions. But the 'position' of the self-conscious people of the Left involves most of them in drastic self-condemnation, in respect of those very sensibilities and qualities that are supposed to be taken as a guarantee of the wisdom of their choice. Their choice, in fact, represents a recantation of their claims to be considered serious minds in their own right : we are asked to

regard them as without integrity except by virtue of their submission to Socialist or Communist values. They are as teachers who have given up teaching because they feel themselves lacking in wisdom, and then stage a come-back on the ground that all pretence of wisdom is fraudulent : wisdom being replaced by the pursuit of ' simple ' things.

One of these simple things is economic justice. Most of them, before their conversion, did not take a categorically economic view of their professional activities ; but now they must do this, since they have joined the masses. They must reverse the natural order of events, in the production of works of literature and art. The natural order is : ' Being a person of integrity, originality and sincere competence, the work I produce is a necessary part of the development of life. Therefore there must be provision for myself and for my work, and I will persist patiently until my work stands justified : I believe in myself enough to face all the risks my activity entails.' Left values reverse this order : first the provision must be made by social, or mass, dispensation, then the writer or artist works in compliance with the orders given, then waits upon the mass verdict—' Do I satisfy ? ' Hence the nervous uncertainty of Left-inclined writers when speaking of their probable status under Communism : an uncertainty far more sinister in its implications than that of any writer facing the present chaotic publishing situation.

There is, of course, an actual economic problem for the writer—and particularly for the poet : which is not, however, political. The poet's economic problem was presented from a non-political point of view in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* (7/5/37).<sup>1</sup> Having drawn attention to a statement by Mr. Baldwin in an address at

<sup>1</sup> Laura Riding and Robert Graves.

Cambridge—‘ I do not think that many poets did much harm in their lives, but they left us incalculable benefits for this world, and if the universities can conspire to produce more poets, more power to their elbow ’—the writers say :

Mr. Baldwin is obviously sincere in his welcome to the poets, but he should have qualified it by a note of warning.

He should have pointed out that no economic provision of an imperial, national, civic or parochial sort is anywhere made for the existence of poets ; that from the sale of poems no serious poet writing in English to-day can expect to make as much annually as the average shop-assistant, or does ; and that the name of poet has long ceased to command popular respect, as is evidenced, for example, by the fact that nowadays no poet who has ever tried to make a living, on the side, by writing novels is ever called anything but ‘ the novelist ’.

Here the problem is given an emphasis impossible in Left terms of analysis : what is wrong with the general attitude to poets. In Left terminology we could only discuss what was wrong with poets from the point of view of the masses—and could only answer that if their situation is unsatisfactory it can only be because they are not helping the masses in their economic struggles and therefore must suffer economically themselves. Thus all Left offers of help to poets are conditional upon their ceasing to be poets and becoming ‘ mass ’.

In Conservative political thought poets are not viewed as ‘ mass ’ : poets are mysterious, ‘ different ’, do something valuable. Conservatives are not sure exactly what it is that poets do and so they fall down on the question of provision. But they do not, at least, pretend to know all about it. Being on the whole better educated, in the conventional sense, than Communists, they do not mind admitting that they are rather un-

educated on the subject of poetry, its functions and place in society. The writers go on to point out that, while Mr. Baldwin in his Cambridge address pleaded for the endowment of research workers to free them from financial anxiety, and teaching, by 'research workers' he meant only doctors and scientists, 'though serious poets are research workers in far more difficult stuff than that represented by the physical sciences.' But Conservative provision for poets would at least not be conditional upon their becoming active Conservatives. The Communist has to convert poets to Communism before he can admit even a possibility of their social usefulness and hence of their right to economic justice.

Might it be said, then, that Communism reduces to mass those writers and artists who in any case have nothing original to contribute to life? As a method of turning mediocrities into mass, capitalism is more efficient—and a little more sensitive to genuine originality.

*How Not to be a Left*

IF A COMMUNIST were giving instructions to someone on how to become a Left, the first rule of thumb would probably be : acquire the habit of looking for the economic motive in everything—in every aspect of daily experience, no matter how devoid of economic significance it may seem. It would mean looking for the economic motive behind every incident reported in the daily paper. It would mean accounting economically for the beautiful or ugly appearance of the houses noticed on walks—attributing economic villainy to those who made ugly houses for others to live in, but even greater economic villainy to those who made beautiful houses for themselves. The prospective Left would have to learn to divide humanity into people who live on wages and people who live on profits—which is like blaming the conditions under which working-class horses live on the horses of the pampered class. He would come to regard economic differences between people as being not merely the cause of material differences but of moral differences as well. He would have to find economic motives to explain his own behaviour and disregard anything that could not be clarified by Communist analysis.

Another instruction might be to abandon any private activities in which he had previously taken serious interest, especially those which afforded only private satisfaction. A person who was drawn to Communism for religious reasons would be forgiven his prayers



and hymn-singing provided that they did not interfere with his 'real work' as a Communist. The person fond of stamp-collecting or gardening would be expected to curtail the time spent with his stamps or flowers because stamps or flowers do not cause strong Communist repercussions. During holidays and spare time the Communist pupil would be asked to 'work', and not spend time 'uselessly' admiring Nature, playing games or reading sentimental novels. (But Nature-love, games and novel-reading are not regarded as useless in the Soviet Union since they are valuable advertisements of Soviet properties—Nature, playgrounds and sentimental novels being State-controlled and thus legitimate sources of pleasure, 'part of life'.)

A third instruction would perhaps be to suppress all purely private emotions. The aim here is for each person to become one of a large class of people expressing the same emotion in the same way. For example, mothers naturally have mother-love, but each mother's love of her child may be said to have a somewhat different quality and to express itself in a somewhat different way. The Left-hearted mother, however, must feel mother-love always in a few stipulated contexts—such as the wages of parents, malnutrition, the war-menace in relation to children. Her mother-love feelings must be identical with those of a large number of other mothers. Only thus can she remain a mother in the emotional sense while becoming 'organized' into the Communist army.

By training himself to express emotions in certain given contexts, by feeling the economic motive in everything, and by reducing the amount of energy spent on purely private activities, a person acquires the 'political level' necessary to the Left supporter. He must now find motives in his own life for wanting

Communism. If he has enough money to live on comfortably he may feel that he has no personal reasons for becoming an active Communist. He realizes that money means leisure, and leisure he knows to be good. But he must reflect that leisure under Capitalism is insecure because Capitalism is economically foolish and uncertain, whereas Communism at least assures a small degree of economic security and so a sure though restricted privilege of leisure.

Many people, especially young people, turn Communist as a result of the 'contact work' done on them by Communists. This Party courting-process may involve a certain amount of introspection on the part of the person selected, but often leaves him unaware of what is happening until the actual moment when the proposal to join the Party is made—by which time the young convert is too bewildered by flattery to resist. Older people join even more haphazardly—for example, on hearing an energetic Communist speaker tear to bits a number of platitudinous Liberal or Socialist speeches that have preceded his own; many weaken their resistance by reading Left pamphlets sedulously given out as 'modern' literature. From the Communist point of view the gradual conversion of the majority to Communism is 'inevitable'—the Party is acting as a sort of catalyst in the social decomposition.

Having joined the Communist minority, one's next step is to become 'active'. This is done by achieving economic solidarity with other 'actives'. Achieving economic solidarity means attending meetings and demonstrations of protest against all forms of Capitalist injustice. In addition, each active must constantly relate the fight against mass economic injustice to the small personal frictions he experiences at work and at play. A factory worker achieves the sensation of economic

solidarity by tirelessly explaining to his fellow-workmen how their trivial, daily grievances are due to fundamental contradictions in the Capitalist economic system ; and he must not fail to familiarize his wife and children with the proper phrases for grumbling over their family difficulties. A literary critic achieves the sensation of economic solidarity in his kind of work by arguing that Shakespeare and Milton and Keats were inspired by progressive economic ideals, and by condemning any new work in which a Left economic bias is not obvious ; and he must convert his mild bourgeois feelings of competition with other critics into a clear sense of economic competition—deplored as necessary under ‘ the system ’.

At this point there is a gap in the story during which the newly launched Left perfects the technique described above. He can go on becoming a better and better Communist. His arguments can become more and more succinct. He can become more and more shrewd in answering challenges about his personal life, until his ‘ position ’ is impregnable. It is during this gap that all the purging takes place within the Communist ranks—the test question being, who is to be allowed to go on ‘ improving internally ’ ? The more impregnable the Communist’s position becomes, the more acutely will non-Communists realize what a handicap it is to live weighted down with Communist armour ; but it will seem impossible to the Communist himself that he should ever wish to throw it off.

If the Communist is an energetic person, Communism will have appealed originally to his sense of efficiency ; he will have felt that as a Communist he would be helping to clear up various social and political muddles, and be making the best of himself in this. But he finds that what he thought was a clearing-up

process is really the process of identifying every kind of problem with the single problem of tidying the economic structure of society: the Marxian revolution must be viewed idealistically as the solution of all problems in one vast economic interpretation. Yet, although all problems are held to be reducible, through Marxian efficiency, to one relatively simple pattern, he finds that many of the Marxists themselves are irremediably inefficient and ineffectual people. He even hears them complaining of one another in terms of their own limited standards of efficiency: 'comrades who would drown any promising campaign in a flood of talk' (Stalin).

Thus Communism induces in the energetic Communist a heightened sense of his own efficiency: he feels different from other Communists, and feels the difference as a difference of efficiency—though he would not yet dare to call this the feeling of wanting to be an ex-Communist. He learns to divide Communists into two kinds of people: those who either do not know or do not care that they are being inefficient, and those who seriously mind whether or not they are doing constructive work, and who must therefore at some time seriously question the appropriateness of calling themselves Communists. It is at this point that he needs to be told how Communism prevents him from making efficient use of his energies.

Real efficiency is being able to combine a number of interests in an orderly way. The housewife displays real efficiency in being able to run her house economically and nicely, to see to the cooking, bring up her children sensibly, entertain, and keep a good atmosphere in the household. Does Communism encourage similar standards of efficiency? What are Communist houses and lives like? Of what quality is Communist entertain-

ment and pleasure? What is the special character of the Communist atmosphere? Do the results of Communist political work justify the poor showing which Communists make as social and domestic beings? If such questions as these cannot be answered satisfactorily—by living evidence, not by arguments—then being a Communist means being damagingly inefficient.

Theoretically, no Communist would admit that any one is justified in wanting to become an ex-Communist, which means that Communism 'theoretically' does not allow such questions to be asked. The fact remains, however, that the Party loses an appreciable percentage of its membership each year—which indicates that some questioning process does go on. Communists attribute the leakage either to an economic law of diminishing Capitalist revival or to a failure of Party education. Any reasons which are the result of thinking about Communism are, of course, regarded as 'subjective'.

From the mystic moment in which the intelligent Left's retreat from Moscow begins, what he will need most is sympathy. He will be looked upon as a deserter, and his Communist acquaintances will try to identify the 'bad influences' responsible. In this embarrassing situation he will need friends—up till now he has only had comrades. It would help if there existed a Party for retiring Communists, or a Chiltern Hundreds where ex-Communists might become acclimatized to the non-Party atmosphere. The point is, many of these ex-Lefts are good material—intelligent, educated, sensitive and energetic people; but they need some kind of protection and help while working off the effects of the difficult ordeal through which they have passed.

One of the questions which the ex-Left asks is: What am I to 'be', now that I am no longer a Left? The answer is: What *are* you? It might help him to con-

sider what the normal sort of reply would be to such a question. A man might reply, for example : ' I am a teacher, liked by my boys. My relations with my wife are excellent. We go boating.' Here, then, are substantial properties testifying to a useful and pleasant life ; and they would show Communism to be an extra form of energy, which cannot be effectively combined with the normal living energies. And a normal woman might reply : ' I am a mother, my children please me, I enjoy the responsibilities of housekeeping, I get pleasure from being hostess to the family and our friends.' Obviously, it would be incongruous to attempt to combine ' open-air ' conspiracy with these humane domestic energies.

The ex-Left may feel that it is not enough to ask himself : What am I ? He may want to include in the question about himself more than the personal realities—but offer him no alternative. When he has worked out a clear and fair picture of what sort of person he really is, and of what really satisfies him and uses his energies to the most pleasant advantage, he may then enlarge the picture : what amount of disturbance to my private conscience does the present state of society and the world-at-large represent ? This is the question about ' wrongs ', about public problems, which is meaningless when asked in Left form—because Left theory does not allow of an answer that takes into account the special gifts or failings, capacities or incapacities, of the person concerned in relation to the problems that need solving. The Left attack on the individual person's conscience does not, moreover, allow him to define the problems in his own way—so that if he resists the attack he becomes stigmatized, in Left jargon, as ' indifferent '. The Left position confers on people the honour of ' caring '—because of being Left ; and that of being no

more and no less articulate on public problems than any other Left dogmatist.

The ex-Left must first of all reverse the process by which he became a Left. He will have to train himself to consider the other factors besides the economic motives that influence the shape of things, and so develop a more flexible approach in judging of people and events. Another task will be that of finding leisure-pursuits to rekindle the power of private enthusiasm—interests chosen apart from their economic significance. There should be fun for all in this.

He will be faced with the problem of freeing himself emotionally from the Left straitjacket. He will have to re-educate his emotions, exist without the stimulation of political hysteria. He will not be like a child, but rather like an actor who has been playing the part of an irritable, dogmatic old man too long. It will at first seem to him that he is merely playing another part. Then, suddenly, it will flash upon him: 'This delightful character is myself!' Let us withdraw and leave him to enjoy this sacred moment in private.

*SECTION FIVE*  
THE REAL ISSUES





*The Question of 'Importance'*

POLITICS ARE CONCERNED always with immediate questions of public morality; and they necessitate the separation of ethics from truth. Political theory is therefore more than mere speculation on administrative problems: it is an attempt to find a justification for public ethics. In place of truth it sets up a truth of compromise. But compromise is merely a mutual adjustment of rights and obligations; like a declaration of the rights of man, it serves as truth only by its opportunistic appeal. When ethics is separated from truth by the political theorists, their decisions on the adjustment of rights are presented with the fervour of truth, truth being construed as a coherence formed, like political institutions, by a process of give and take between purpose and fact.

In a primitive community politics are impossible because truth, in the emotional form of religion, is identical with ethics; immediate and final values are emotionally identical. There is no separation of existence into external and internal aspects. There is no emphatic immediatizing of daily life against futurized finalities. There is no opposition of immediate good to final good. Such separation only begins to be made when man begins to find old definitions of reality inadequately simple; and yet to feel appalled by the complexity of thought required if he is to integrate himself consciously with reality. He divides reality into historical and speculative reality.

The opposition 'life' and 'truth' was resolved by primitive man in a system of emotionalized symbols. The source of this ritual was in thought of an unimmediate temper, sparingly precipitated into life. But there is no 'way back' to such an integration in life. The courage of consciousness has involved a development of thought as cunning (science), and a self-protective resistance to thought in life. Primitive ritual cannot now serve as an integrating technique for this opposition, nor any technique of integration in life. Integration can now only take place in thought, by a realization of its ultimate identity with truth. Integration in life is only possible when life itself makes no pretence of being more than momentarily real—only momentary integration is possible in life. In its modern existence in separation from thought, life has broken down under the strain of being continuously real from moment to moment: not even momentary integration is achieved, because as a self-sufficient continuum it loses the power of being real.

In historical reality man can enjoy a sense of integration in a simply definable, practically demonstrable public morality. The idea of social right seems more real than the notion of truth because it is easier to live successfully than to know successfully. In politics, the faculties of intelligence are practised on local problems, for which solutions can be found, or suggested, with a greater effect of positive capability than they can for the general problems which come under the heading 'truth'. Politics, indeed, are the mode in which the mind naturally exercises itself in its youth, when it needs obvious results with which to feed its courage; as historical reality is the percept of thought in its adolescence, and history itself the adolescence of existence. The problems which now occupy politics are problems which should all have been

settled long ago ; problems many of which have, indeed, been settled long ago ; or problems, at least, which are properly the subject of instinctive local intelligence—which, when generalized into universal causes, remain unsolved under the weight of speculative thought brought to bear on them.

Impatience with the apparently 'abstract' results of poetry has driven many poets to politics : those poets to whom the success of a poem, of writing a poem, is not actual because it is not 'concretely' demonstrable. The abandonment of poetry for politics is a confession of mental youthfulness ; it constitutes an acknowledgment of failure—the failure to find immediate reality in thought. Politics have an immediacy sustained by public attention. The immediacy of poetry is dateless, self-sustaining, not dependent on historical interest. It is not possible to persuade people of a poetic truth, to reassure oneself of its immediate importance by making it a subject of contemporary discussion ; a poem cannot be publicly canvassed as a political view can. The greater concrete satisfaction of politics is easily understandable. In politics the mind can exercise itself with a sense of obvious accomplishment, as it cannot in poetry. Poetry, the completely adult expression, does not 'show' ; it is thought in a final condition of truth, not a physical display of mental processes, or a system of physical administration.

The combining of political with poetic ends is a wilful falsification of the nature of poetry, which can have no special interest in the moral mechanics of life at a particular time, in a particular place. It is a transference of poetic seriousness to the practical urgencies, the use of poetry as an art of persuasion. Politics are concerned, and can only be concerned, with civic order ; their definitions resolve into statutes of good-neighbourliness. Their

very existence depends on the existence of differences of opinion as to the obligations of neighbourliness—when there is agreement on the intra-community obligations, politics cease to exist. In poetry there are no opinions, because its order is not experimentally imposed; there are no 'how's' in poetry. The order of poetry is the order with which being itself is instinct; poetry is the discovery of the values by which there is being, not the creation of external patterns of order.

In Lenin's pamphlet *State and Revolution*, the dictatorship of the proletariat is declared to be a temporary phase between the revolution and the 'withering away' of the state. Communism proposes a society in which everybody shall belong to the same economic class, with a common object of physical well-being. Since Lenin believed that politics and the state were the results of the class-struggle, their existence was to cease as soon as the dictatorship of the proletariat had led to the establishment of a Communist society. But an agreement based merely on physical obligations cannot provide a background for any fundamental agreement in values, because those who subscribe to it must devote all their energy to maintaining the compact if it is to endure without the convenience of a state-form. Communism, in this way, would only be substituting intense pre-occupation with state-solidarity for the more casual and spontaneous citizenship bred by the conventional state. The perpetuation of such a self-suspicious self-conscious society would no more favour community of thought than does submission to undemocratic tyrannies. There would be no room in the society for anything but economic repair and development, so that the 'withering away' of the state would only mean the substitution of an economic state for a political one, the replacement of politics by economics. This is what

is actually happening in Russia. Stalin's book on Leninism contains no mention of the 'withering away' of the state ; it is occupied with the application of Lenin's precepts to the development of the economic state. The Communist agreement on community obligations does not represent the liquidation of practical urgencies, but their aggrandizement into a finality of state-welfare.

The poet's answer to the question 'To what party do you belong?' is : 'I belong to poetry. I try to live by an all-inclusive order of values, in a state of reconciliation with all the particular senses into which the universal meaning of existence vitally resolves itself.' The poet who is not happy, because of so living, is no poet. Poets have personal misfortunes as other people do ; but a personal misfortune should be a historical curiosity to a poet—something out of the youth of the mind, a sentimental echo of physical life in maturity. The poet who answers the question 'To what party do you belong?' with a political slogan is asserting a personal misfortune : 'I do not get on well with my neighbours.' Or : 'I take it as a personal misfortune that all over the world there is bad-neighbourliness between people. It is not so much that I feel personally victimized by the bad-neighbourliness existing between people, but that as a poet I naturally have highly developed sympathies, which make me treat the misfortunes of others as my own. As a poet, moreover, my interest is in a state of universal reconciliation, and if that is ever to come about it must be built up solidly, from the bottom.' But the state of reconciliation which is the end of poetry is an end of thought, not of physical activity. It is not a state to be 'built up' ; it is not postponed by reactionary principles of neighbourliness or advanced by humanitarian ones. It cannot be made to exist : it must be discovered.

Poetry is not a by-product of good living. On the

contrary, good living is a by-product of poetry. The problems raised by the physical interaction of persons in community relations are problems to be liquidated rather than solved. And they can only be liquidated by the removal from them of emphatic stress. History has been the learning where to lay stress. Economic liquidation is the shifting of emphasis from concerns of body to concerns of mind. Let there be economic justice and civil decency, by all means, but because these are unimportant, not important, ends. We live to think, not to live. The point must be stated extremely, since the political forces which have sapped the confidence of so many writers are extreme in their publicist arrogance: only by thinking happily—that is, by the life of thought—can we live happily. Comparatively speaking, it is cruel and wrong that people who work by the sweat of their brows should live in squalor, while others who work in unsweating cleverness should live in hygienic ease. Absolutely speaking, words like ‘cruel’ and ‘wrong’ exaggerate the importance of hygienic ease.

The accessories of external life have only a joking reality. To live in a house, eat, dress, go to bed: what could be more comic? We know that we do not really do it. This is only what it looks like from the outside—which is to say, before we have got inside our own minds. In this comic state of physical pre-life there can be no room for personal misfortune. It is not cruel or wrong that hard-working people should live in squalor, but merely grotesque: physical life is too trivial to carry an accent of suffering with dignity. The very idea of personal misfortune is itself grotesque. Physical suffering can teach no more profound a lesson than that of shame—the shame of treating the unimportant as important. Is there, then, no such thing

as suffering? There are stages in thought of arduous self-purification; thinking which is merciless to the comic leniencies of life. But it is impossible to characterize the experiences of thought as misfortunes: whatever happens in thought is fortunate, since to think is to enter into the grace of poetic unity. And what of the poet's universal sympathies? The universal sympathies have nothing to do with misfortune; there are no permanent misfortunes.

But what does such an attitude mean in the face of statistically established misfortunes? Do we then propose to ignore economic injustice and civic indecency, to recommend that they and the sight of them be borne with a sense of humour? Indeed, no. We do not say, wittily, that squalor is the natural complement of sweat. We do not recommend a sense of humour as an attitude, but as a grace of method. We do not criticize the fact of political activity, but its solemnity. We assert that civic improvements brought about by solemn political stress have an incidental accompaniment of intellectual degeneracy. That a firm physical serenity can only be achieved by an insistence on the pleasurable triviality of physical existence. That the proper political attack is not by a solemnified working class on the classes solemnly entrenched in the physical importances, but a poetic attack on the solemnities of the physical importances. That, further, this is what is happening of itself. And it would happen more buoyantly, with less dismalness of dialectic phraseology, if the political orators would leave the working class and all the classes alone. For it is not merely the working class that is lifting the stress from the impressiveness of physical property. Every one is experiencing in some degree a realization of the triviality of property, which endears it privately while robbing it of symbolical sacredness.



Burke's attitude to private property is typical of the property-minded. In his *Reflections on the French Revolution* he writes : 'The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself. It makes our weakness subservient to our virtue ; it grafts benevolence even upon avarice.' This fear of living without a demonstrable background of possessions is comparable to the Communist fear of individual expression without the sanction of the propertied state. For the Communist emphasis leans the same way as Burke's : toward the preservation and extension of property, it being only a question of administration whether the property is public or private.

*Poetic Common-Sense*

ONE MUST SUSPECT POETS who enter the parley—bullied into publicism by the challenge that they are ignoring ‘reality’ and by their own embarrassment in having nothing to ‘show’. Nothing to show? And what of poems? Or, rather, where are the poems they should be writing? And what is the political value of what they write instead of poems? The proper attitude of a poet to a political problem is: how to reduce its importance? But when a poet turns politician he is capable only of sarcastic solemnities or sentimental witticisms. For he has lost the grace of poetry in the translation. He knows that physical problems are not important, but his apparatus is poetic—he cannot shake off the formal commitment to seriousness. Thus, what the political poet has to show is the insincerely impassioned diatribe, culminating in tears or disdain. *A sincere political poem is an impossibility.* And by ‘political poem’ we mean not merely the poem with an obvious political theme, but any poem resulting from an equation of political with poetic consciousness—whether it be the work of Wordsworth, or W. H. Auden. Auden is not so naïvely political as Stephen Spender :

Oh comrades, let not those who follow after,  
 —The beautiful generation that shall spring from our sides—  
 Let them not write how after the failure of banks,  
 The failure of cathedrals and the declared insanity of our rulers,  
 We lacked the Spring-like resources of the tiger  
 Or of plants which strike out new roots to gushing waters

But through torn-down portions of old fabric let their eyes  
Watch the admiring dawn explode like a shell  
Around us, dazing us with its light like snow.

For Spender, as for any political-minded poet, poetry becomes a school of speculation for the sharpening of the social energies :

. . . poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice.

Oh, the fascination of behaving as if life were still in its infancy—the false vigour of youth, when little ends are made into big ones ! Do we not really know—do poets, at least, not really know—that the years of simplicity are behind us, that we have entered into the age of existence which is ruled by thought ? We have learned, and there is no longer any excuse for being young. We have learned what is big and what little, what important and what unimportant : there should be no mis-laying of stress, no error of conduct or judgement, that we do not know for error. What is needed is not knowledge, but respect for the knowledge we have : self-respect. We know that political enthusiasms lead to incongruous meddling in the lives of people with whom we can identify ourselves only in aggressive homelessness ; that political truth is not truth, but a physical evasion of the responsibility of thinking truthfully. The people who have invented political language for the working class are not, for the most part, active members of any distinct economic community. No one has a right to impose a plan of daily relations on, say, miners and mine-owners who is not natively either a miner or a mine-owner. Let each be about his own daily business.

There is, indeed, a universal business in which the concern of one is the concern of all. But this business is not a benevolent intrusion of our energy into the lives of others. The universal business which we may all be about is thought : the clarification of what we all *are*, not inquisitive application to what we all do, the way we all live. The universal business of thought is the occupation of everybody in particular ; it is not, like the General Will of Rousseau, a community-interest nullifying individual interests, or, like his Will of All, merely the sum of individual interests. The distinction lies in the difference between will and thought. Thought, unlike will, is not an apparatus for the execution of aggregate projects ; its very occurrence is a contribution to the universal business. The community-business of will is stimulated by a sense of advantage, to oneself or another, and directed toward ends the importance of which is defined in terms of special effects. Nor is the General Will in Rousseau's sense formed by a mysterious consolidation of a supra-individual interest, but by an exaggeration of individual will in a few : the intellectual caprice of the few, which translates the emotional indifference of the many into an apparent General Will—a hypothetical distribution of enthusiasm.

If miners of a given working community themselves specifically appeal to persons whose province of life is associated with theirs in practical neighbourliness, let these respond according to their neighbourly feelings. But let no one make 'ideological' identifications of community-interest. Let no one do what he does not feel locally moved to do. Advantages gained through the sentimental intervention of others bring indignity. Political espousal of the cause of the working class brings more indignity than did old-fashioned civic 'paternalism,' under which the poor thought of themselves as children :

Left political paternalism has taught the poor to think of themselves as step-children.

And all this we know. There is no politics-chattering poet who does not know where his real business lies. There is no politics-chattering miner who does not respect his job more than the ideology of which he has been made a gift, who does not know that a more dignified settlement of injustices could be made without political rhetoric. What ! Let people starve because political rhetoric is undignified ? No, of course not. But there is nothing to prove that advances in physical comfort among the working class over the conditions a hundred years ago are the result of organized Socialist rhetoric. There is, on the other hand, much to show that Socialist rhetoric has impeded advance by the quality of sneering it injects into employee-consciousness. Just as the negroes might now be free with more dignity if their freedom had not been made into a political cause. But how could they have been freed otherwise ? Natural economic laws were already conspiring to free them ; slave-owners themselves were coming to feel oppressed by the responsibilities of their own system. Does any one really believe that only those things happen which are made to happen ? Very few events in the history of the world have been the result of a rhetorical predetermination to have them happen. Indeed, political agitation is more credible as a sentimental anticipation of changes in the process of coming to be than as itself an instrument of change . . . the moths of garrulity fluttering round the flame of event.

We know that political ideas are strangers to their human subjects. We know that the daily, trivial course of life proceeds by details, not generalities. We know that political-mindedness in a poet is an insincerity, a studiously youthful enthusiasm for an adopted country

in which he does not really mean to live. Then why do poets 'do it', and why do they acquire public prestige in doing it? They do it because they get what is called 'fun' out of it. The public prestige they acquire is no more than a technical admiration for the skill with which they are able to degrade themselves. They could not degrade themselves so skilfully, or be so disingenuously admired for it, if they and their public did not know the perversion of values involved. This is what happens when people regard their knowledge as an elder self which exists for the purpose of inspiring insubordination in the younger, living self. An odium of decrepit grey-beardedness attaches to living as wisely as we think. What tempts the poet into politics more than anything else is the fear of seeming a literary prig. And so he becomes a political, a revolutionary, prig.

To quote now a typical culture-definition of politics—by Dr. R. H. Tawney, the president of the Workers' Educational Association :

When I read of fervent disclaimers by some of our branches of any concern with politics I appreciate the good intentions behind them, but I cannot help feeling that they betray a misconception of the meaning of the word 'politics.'

Politics in the larger sense, however, are not a vice to be repudiated, but a virtue to be practised. They are the art of mobilizing intelligence and good-will to remove, by collective action, evils against which we are powerless as individuals, and to win in association victories for civilization which as isolated units we cannot hope to achieve. I hope that the time will never come when the sciences concerned with the life of man in society are relegated to a second place.

A very ingratiating piece of solemnity, which conveys the quality of the political stress more vividly than any doctrinaire exposition : first place forever for the sciences concerned with the life of man in society ! The

life of man in society has first place only by the law of historical priority which makes youth more important than maturity because, in the progression from lesser to greater strength of consciousness, it comes 'first'. This reverence for the sciences of social existence proceeds from a fear of losing the power to live in the power to think. Yet we have no real fear of losing the power to live, since the power to think has neutralized the anxiety for self-preservation and rid life of superstitious effort to keep alive. We do not merely believe in the realities of the second and last places beyond those of the first place : we go to them. Or, at least, we know that they immediately exist to go to, without the rite of ecclesiastical death.

We have come into articulate knowledge of what we are by a physical path—'the life of man in society' ; approaching ourselves with scrupulous ignorance. It would be brutal to our history to become, suddenly, lightning and majestic spirits, haughtily forgetting the slowness, clumsiness and pettiness from which we have finally rescued our minds. Let us do honour to the daily obstacles with which we tested our ultimate reality : even to the life of man in society. But not by political-mindedness.

Society consists of things, not people : social relations between people are really relations between their things, their appointed obstacles. The nature of the social relations between people is unsentimentally defined in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, in which the natural state of man is described as one of warring competition for personal property and attainments, from which safety and stability can only be found in an arrestation under a despotic power. Hobbes was prepossessed by the notion of a strong state to order the competition among people for things, since he was living at a time when the desire

for things and for a guarantee of their inviolability had led to the Civil War. Thought was harnessed to the competition of things, and the competition of different ways with things, as is to be seen by the period's conversion of Milton into a pamphleteer. Hobbs was anxious for the reinstatement of thought in its proper place in the hierarchy of human activities. He recommended that political concerns should be confided to a sovereign power equipped to administer them with practical efficacy and thus mitigate their importance as subjects for general intellectual preoccupation. Because of this he has had abuse heaped upon him by equalitarian theorists, who confuse the responsibilities of consciousness with the physical necessities of living, the dignity of thought with the laborious triumph of possession, and, therefore, the personal sense of happiness with the political sense of participation in the control of things.

Not to dishonour things : indeed, let us continue to live socially, by things. The alternative, then, to political-mindedness? The poetic alternative to political-mindedness is tidiness. Political-mindedness is not a faculty, but just talk addressed to things, which cannot hear. Tidiness is a faculty especially developed for the benefit of things. A loving and humorous faculty, the art of lending importance where there is little—woman's contribution to the life of man in society.

Our power to think is surely firm enough to leave us energy to practise this enchantment. Cultivation and production, food, clothes, houses ; this is all a spell we cast, by which things are also ourselves—a living extension, through our faculty of tidiness. If we break the spell by political-mindedness and attempt to endow things with intelligence, then assuredly they will collapse into non-existent concreteness, disenchanting and meaningless. And that would be the end of society. It



is difficult to keep up a spell when people argue that it can be maintained better by rational means—that is, by leaving the things to make their own spell.

We are discussing material problems poetically? Even so. We do not believe that things have a poetry of their own—politics.

*Life, Beauty and Truth*

THERE ARE THINGS, and meanings. A thing is a dissociated detail, so dissociated that it is entirety to itself. A meaning is a detail of the absolute entirety *truth* ; it cannot exist in dissociation, as things can ; it is not physical. But we can say, nevertheless, that a thing 'has' meaning. Things exist dissociatedly, but they can acquire meaning by our emotional incorporation of them in truth : by their very passiveness, their non-resistance to our energy of integration. They have meaning, that is, only through being so indifferent to meaning that they lend themselves to the spell of meaning we cast over them. The indifference and the isolatedness by which they are things are also the qualities by which we are able to effect their temporary participation in the world of meaning : to associate things with meanings as if they were meanings, to nullify their unco-operative physicality. Thus entirety is for us larger emotionally than it is in thought ; we allow ourselves to feel it larger than we know it to be.

In the early stages of mind things predominated over meanings ; we filled in the meaning-gaps in entirety with things. Then, as thought distinguished itself from physical sensation, entirety gradually filled itself in with meanings. And not only were the meaning-gaps filled in with meanings, but things were seen as obscuring what must ultimately be filled in with meanings. We divested ourselves, as we could, of thingishness.

The filling in of a gap in entirety temporarily manifest

in terms of things is that act which is a poem. The rendering of a place in entirety in terms of things is merely a description : the statement that here is a meaning-gap so filled in. Poetry is entirety completely filled in with meaning. The content of a poem is not the things it so to speak displaces ; it is the fact of its being a place in entirety. And its form is its reference to, its implication of, other poems—to places of its own kind, places which consist of meaning, not of things. A poem is its own content ; and its form is its existence among other poems, in poetry. The content of things, however, is not peculiar to them ; their content is uniformly 'matter', which is merely infinite transience accreted into a seeming totality and broken up into seeming individualities. And the form of things is not derived from reference to, implication of, other things ; they belong to no organic entirety. Their form is the personality with which we artificially endow them in the descriptions our senses make of them. A description by thought is a communication ; it is poetic—not a description. A description by the senses is an extension of meaning to something poetically non-existent, without self, generically unattached to significant entirety.

The power to describe things, to endow them with temporary significance, is our own power of change. The description of a thing makes it historical—something that was and is not : in describing it we give a sense of change to its meaningless inertia. Our power of change, applied to ourselves, is the instrument by which we reject temporal eccentricities from our integral meaning. It is the constant government of what was by what is. This power of legislation for ourselves is the power of life. We apply it to things as well as to ourselves because its technique is that of doubt—in doubting our own validity in a certain temporal condition of meaning we

identify our nature with the nature of things, which are subject to no other law than that of change. We cannot avoid including them in this process of self-description, although we know that their temporal condition, with the changeability it implies, is a portent of disappearance rather than of further stages of self-clarification—that our momentary descriptive power over them cannot stay the course of disintegration. In the determination of meaning, life is an agency of change from true to more true, and poems are the guarantee that the change represents a progress, not a decline, a more precise affirmation of meaning, not a denial. In the determination of descriptive plausibility—which is the domain of science as the determination of meaning is the domain of poetry—life, or change, is exercised in denial: in historical attention to the course from appearance to disappearance.

Descriptions of things begin as a doubt of their validity and an expectation of change. But this change can only be progress in disintegration, disappearance. The will to change when applied to things in descriptive attention produces only a consciousness that physical life is a progressive destruction of the appearance of meaning. Science, which is the literature of descriptions, is temporal truth—truth arrived at by thought at the level of things; belief in the purely momentary impression, and in that alone because of life, change. A consciousness descriptively absorbed in the phenomenal aspects of change forgets that life is a provision of the mind for its own mobility in a comprehensive experience of truth; it makes truth the equivalent of life.

Against descriptive truth we set poetic truth, which does not consist of descriptive data but is that which it describes. In poetic truth, life—the change-process, the destruction of temporal and temporary appearance—is a

purification which makes individual meaning increasingly identical with truth ; it remains a process, non-existent when its end of purification is reached and never achieving the autonomy of significance, because it concerns only that which is not. Descriptive, or scientific, truth is in effect the definition of the not-true. If things had an articulate conscience, their contribution to truth would be what science is : the assertion ' We are not true, we possess only relative truth, we are existent only in anticipation of that which will render us non-existent, we have relevance in a temporal series recurrent as untruth.' But things cannot make this assertion of themselves, only by the influence on them of truth—their disintegration is their assertion. In lending them voice by which to make it we are using the voice of truth to utter negation. Yet truth is not the murder of physical reality. It is the revelation of reality as structural thought—a coherent entirety of meaning.

A poet purifies his age of historical appearances. He translates time into a condition of meaning, replaces ' objective ' experience with poems, which are structural parts of permanent entirety. An age, historically viewed, is an arbitrary, emotional totality whose only reality is in its disintegration. One age, as a totality, contradicts the ages that preceded and succeeded it.

' An age is the reversal of an age.' This was asserted as a summary truth by a poet (W. B. Yeats) who believed in poems but not in poetry, to whom poems themselves participated in the process of historical reversal. The opposition of poems to life is, in such a view, a sentimental opposition—to write a poem, a beautifully suicidal act. But a poet has the responsibility of taking the paradox ' poems written in life, which is to say in time ' a stage further, beyond paradox : that poems achieve a constancy as poetry by which they disprove the

reality of life because it perpetually disappears from the fixed norm of poetry.

History consists of self-consuming imitations of entirety. Yet, while an age is immediate to itself, the obsession with its appearance of entirety endows it with a physical eloquence ; and this physical eloquence of entirety is *beauty*. Truth is not beautiful, poetry is not beautiful. Beauty is the quality of seeming true in time, the quality of imitative completeness. And it is characteristic of the process which results in the term 'beauty' that we know the appearance of permanence which the beautiful has to be no more than that. In applying the term we suspend the will to change which motivates description ; we relax the power of analytic negation ; we affirm as true what we know to be only an appearance—a nostalgic affirmation of a desire for truth.

History thus depends largely for its plausibility on a sense of beauty—on a love of truth rather than on its own trueness. The science of *æsthetics*, by an analysis and comparison of psychological reactions to 'things of beauty', creates the abstraction 'aesthetic feeling', which it seeks to justify in a scientific theory of *æsthetic* truth. This confusion of beauty with truth is a German achievement, arising from a revision of the Greek association of beauty with ethics. The word *αἰσθητικός* means 'what has to do with sense-perception as a source of knowledge'; it was A. G. Baumgarten in the eighteenth century who first used it in the narrower sense of 'pertaining to the contemplative enjoyment of beauty'. The narrower sense makes *aesthetics* a dispute about taste in relation to appearances, the older sense a matter for psychological investigation and endless subjective-objective dissension of an ethical tone. Aesthetic findings, like the findings of political theory,

are exalted to the position of seeming-truth—by the assumption that truth can be an attribute of beauty or ethics, whereas it is they, rather, which are attributes of perception when truth is shrouded in historical contexts.

Politics are the destruction of the beauty of history ; we might call politics the self-loathing of history—loathing of its beauty, its seeming-true. As science is the destructive description of things, so politics are the destructive description of time itself—the ages, the imitative totalities into which things form. This is why the finalities of politics are always future ages which are negations of past ages. Truth to politics is an entirety of emptiness : the cumulative destruction of relative, historical truth. And the savageness of politics is the satisfaction of destroying illusion—extinct beauty. But politics have validity only in the contexts of history ; they can have no validity in the contexts of truth, in poetic contexts. They represent the suicide to which history is committed.

To despise the physical involves a thought-destroying preoccupation with the physical. Science breeds despair ; politics, hate. In science and politics we forget that life is a process incidental to an end of the fulfilment of which there can never have been any doubt : the identification of truth. Truth exists, identifiably—we are here to identify it. Forgetting this end, we make life itself an end.

Science becomes the self-mortification of living ; politics, self-contempt. But, fundamentally, life is what we do in love of truth ; it carries no importance of self-mortification or self-contempt. It is, merely, the extreme caution, the technique of delay, with which we allow ourselves to enter into the domain of truth. Life is of the nature of love, not of the nature of scientific or

political energy. Love between male and female consciousness is the method by which life as love of truth is generated. Love of truth is self-love ; it is generated by categorizing the personal content of truth as male and female. Female consciousness personalizes the singleness of truth in an entirety of diversified meaning ; male consciousness personalizes diversity of meaning in an entirety of unique truth. When we can describe what we have been in life in terms of what we are in truth, the melancholy of science and the bitterness of politics are dissolved in self-love. But by self-love meaning no more than the certainty that the energy of truth must be ourselves.



*Poets and the Masses*

THE ENGLISH LEFT WING writers are almost without exception déclassé aristocrats or bourgeois. John Strachey, in an article *The Education of a Communist* (December 1934), discusses frankly the pathology of his kind, and says that his ironical stock-reply to 'Why did you become a Communist?'—'From chagrin at not getting into the Eton Cricket Eleven'—has more truth in it than he altogether enjoys admitting. He quotes as illuminating Bertrand Russell's first greeting to him: 'What's the matter with you? I had a neglected childhood.' He goes on: 'Many and deep are the personal neuroses which had made me rebel against society. But does not this fact about my character prove that Communism is a neurotic illusion? I do not think so. The existence of the world-wide movement of the revolt of the working-class is real, is objectively determined, and has nothing to do with the personal flaws and faults of any of those members of the intelligentsia who support it.' John Strachey went shortly after the War to Oxford, still a staunch Conservative in spite of his alleged chagrin in failing to get First Eleven colours at his public school, and there, as president of his college literary society, felt wistfully the contrast between the stupidity and torpidity of the undergraduates of his own party and the energy and wit of the members of the flourishing University Labour Club. Each new secession to the Left disturbed him. A struggle was going on in him between the temptation to follow the easy course and succeed his

father as editor of the family-owned *Spectator*, and the shame of being stigmatized, if he did so, as a reactionary, out of the modern swim. His case was a common one among the young writers of his generation. They felt that they must make a choice between Left and Right, and that to choose Right was a confession of intellectual dowdiness. To this fear was added a sense of guilt in belonging to the governing classes, in owning dress-suits and white cricket-boots and a car. To become a Left was a gesture of placation to the god of humanity, a self-dedication to the task of preaching one's own indecency as a capitalist to the workers. But was it possible to be at once a Communist and free to write just as one wished ?

Strachey, for one, was uncertain. He became first a member of the Independent Labour Party, and then a 'New Party' Fascist. He says now that 'the whole folly, and worse, of the New Party adventure was for me, at bottom, one last desperate attempt to avoid becoming a Communist.' He became a Communist because 'the price of remaining in the capitalist camp was complete intellectual and moral prostitution'. As a Communist, however, he was bound to observe various precepts of Lenin's such as 'Art must serve Propaganda,' and 'Literature must become party-literature'. 'As a counterpart to bourgeois . . . literary self-seeking and individualism, the socialist proletariat must put forward the principle of *Party Literature* and carry it out in its fullest, completest form.' It did not seem possible to him to get along without party support : that was writing 'in vacuo'.

The Russians have emphasized this point. In the official handbook *Literature of the People of the U.S.S.R.* 1934 it is recorded : 'To us it seems more than a matter of mere chance that many gifted poets of Western Europe feel very strongly the uselessness of writing

poetry. The main reason for this is to be found in the absence of unity in modern bourgeois life. It is this unity of consciousness, this unity of the perception of reality, which is peculiar to modern Soviet Poetry. Poetry here is not isolated from life, it is one of its component parts and is its organic continuation. Poetry here is needed by the masses, the people of the country of Socialism, because it clears their own thoughts and feelings, educates, elevates and purifies them. Here the poet is no longer the proud recluse, living in the stifling atmosphere of individualistic reflexions: he becomes the representative and spokesman of great human masses.

The poet is offered an immense audience if he can persuade himself that it is not 'intellectual and moral prostitution', but a perception of reality, to make poetic fulfilment identical with the proletarian revolution. Ilya Ehrenburg, a Russian poet, speaking at the Paris Congress of Writers:

In bourgeois society the poet has no fixed place. . . . When a bourgeois does not understand a work of art he accuses the creator of it; in our country the worker, if he does not understand, accuses himself.

This is the promise of not only an immense audience, but a respectful one.

The Communist poet, according to T. H. Wintringham, an editor of the *Left Review* and an Oxford contemporary of John Strachey's, has his choice between following the school of Yessenin ('like the smoke of a peat fire, like early W. B. Yeats') and that of Mayakowsky ('shouted from full lungs, more powerful than Vachel Lindsay, more real, like the clang of steel rivets hammered into steel plates'). He records a Russian literary conversation in 1920:

The Communist Yegor: 'Yes, we can be amateurs of Yessenin, but the future poetry is Mayakowsky's, is belonging to the revolution.'

'How will you make that happen? By decree?' jeered a girl. 'When we are through this dark time and there is a chance to write poetry again, it will be free: no more manifestoes. Would you organize poets into a militarized trades union?'

'Nonsense,' said Yegor, from behind a crooked emphatic *pince-nez*, 'it is only those who joined the party for a job who would try that. We will build the sort of life, the sort of Russia, that will naturally compel poets to make their poems out of it. All this moonlight and cattle-manure sort of verse will seem stale bread then.'

'A man as coarse as you cannot understand these things.'

Yet between early W. B. Yeats and a more powerful Vachel Lindsay seems a limited choice. In nineteen years all that seems to have been accomplished is the triumph of steel rivets over peat smoke. Three prominent Russian Communists visited London in 1935 and recited some of their poems before an earnest literary gathering. They were leonine fellows who admired Kipling, besides Vachel Lindsay. They ranted their poems in huge voices. One of the poems was about a train-smash, and in some preliminary remarks the poet said, 'Although you do not understand Russian, you will be able to *hear* the collision.' One could! In general talk afterwards, one of them remarked, 'I write about the intellectual passions.'

It appears that Mayakowsky was a martyr to the Revolution even before he committed suicide. Lev Niculin has described his life in Paris ('At the Top of the Human Voice', in *International Literature* 1933) and

the struggle that went on within Mayakowsky of the lyrical poet with the political poet, of the poet who knew the secret of direct, hypnotizing lyrical effect and refused to use it. He could if he liked have lulled his readers with whispers . . .

instead he wrote about the public baths, about baths for workers' flats. . . . He wanted to turn poetry into a true servant of life.

Yet, as the sacrifice was only early Yeats for super-Lindsay, it could not have been a very painful experience. Yeats himself, in middle age, sacrificed early whispers for a gay and warty intellectualism of the passions without, apparently, undergoing any distressing constitutional change.

Bukharin to the poets :

Poetic creation and its product, poetry, is a definite type of social activity and in its development, in spite of the specific nature of poetry, obeys the laws of social development. The objective and active significance of the social function of poetry—to formulate it most generally—is to master and transmit experience and to train character, to reproduce definite group psychologies. . . . Comrades, you must dare.

Russian verse technique and the vernacular of the working classes are, it seems, to set standards of English poetry. Alec Brown, a British member of the Writers' International, writes, in capital letters : ' Whom are we writing for and how ? Are we an organization of revolutionary writers or are we not ? ' He suggests as a slogan : ' Literary English from Caxton to us is an artificial jargon of the Ruling Class : written English begins with us.' Another member replied to this :

The proletarianization of our language is an imperative task of craftsmanship and should result in the enrichment of written English, but the task involves something more delicate and complex than merely converting the written word into a sort of crystallized model of the spoken word. We cannot completely ignore our great heritage of written English. Yet the essential validity of Alec Brown's criticism cannot be questioned. A great deal of what we write is

unintelligible jargon to our worker readers. . . . In conclusion I would like to pay homage to the authentic voice of the proletarian writer in Simon Blumenfeld's contribution.

Simon Blumenfeld's vision of the proletarian writer is :

He expresses in words the struggling, dark consciousness of the broad masses, the revolutionary thrust immanent in the daily struggle for bread. He says in a loud, clear unequivocal voice what the workers are trying but don't know how to say.

Poets use a language which is the result of thinking poetically, and readers, to understand this language, must themselves think poetically ; when readers do, given a poem whose language is 'difficult' only in being the expression of the kind of thought a poet can think and express more clearly than anybody else, then they can say, properly, that what the poet says is what they are trying but do not know how to say. But the reader of a poem must be for the occasion of the poem a sort of poet himself. (As, in eating appreciatively a very competently prepared meal, one is being for the occasion a sort of cook oneself.) It is not a case of the poet's becoming a sort of reader. In his strictly local range of life the reader is far better equipped to speak for himself than the poet could on his behalf : he does not go to the poet for lessons in how to speak with rhetorical force to his employer, but for poetry. Indeed, most people, and particularly the so-called workers, are so well versed in colloquial self-expression that they tend to regard poetic language as a foppish encumbrance. Miners, for example, are highly knowledgeable and eloquent about the conditions of their life and industry. If a poet conscientiously set himself to help miners express themselves more effectively, he would find himself reproducing, merely, the intense dialect of mining-life and abandoning any

notion of poetry-for-miners. He would admit to being faced with a purely personal choice : did he want to be a miner, or did he want to be a poet ?

The political impulse cannot originate natively in poets; it can form no part of the original poetic impulse. The political impulse derives from social uncertainty, the poetic impulse from universal certainty. The inspiring sense of politics is quantitative ; that of poetry, qualitative. Poets turn to politics when social pressure makes them feel nervous of their identity—' different ' : they forget that their difference represents their being more qualitatively articulate than other people and seek the substantiation of numbers, which necessarily dilutes the concentration of meaning they have achieved by being poets. When poets turn to politics, it is generally to popular politics. When they have identified themselves with aristocratic politics, this has meant, rather, moving in aristocratic circles, and because in such circles they find a loose cultural integration which allows them a haphazard independence from quantitative criteria of importance. Society, in the aristocratic sense, is an island of proud retirement from the numerical populace. Poetic character is not founded on pride, nor does it involve retirement ; but aristocratic patronage of poets has done less harm to their work than the patronage of the popular public.

*Who are the Workers?*

THE POPULAR PUBLIC exercises a more tyrannical influence over literature as it is the more assiduously educated. This is due to the sentimental translation of the democratic principle—unexceptionable as the principle that every one has not only the right, but the obligation, of being responsible for himself—into a statement of historical achievement: that every one *has* equal capability with every one else. Thus, democratic education cancels the notion of given talent, and every reader feels himself the potential equal of the author in the author's matter; and thus most of the books presented to readers are actually written by readers rather than by authors.

The first clause of the Declaration of the Rights of Man by the National Assembly of France runs: 'Men are born, and always continue, free and equal in respect of their rights. Civil distinctions, therefore, can be founded only on public utility.' A section of the sixth clause contains the sentence: 'and all being equal in its [the law's] right, are equally eligible to all honours, places and employments, according to their different abilities, without any other distinction than that created by their virtues and talents.' Social success, the most cunning adaptation of talent to the practical opportunities, is declared to be the democratic test of distinction. Clause eleven of the Declaration runs: 'The unrestrained communication of thoughts and opinions being one of the most precious Rights of Man, every citizen may speak,



write and publish freely, provided he is responsible for the abuse of this liberty, in cases determined by the law ' ; but it is clear that the value of thought itself is made to lie in its significance as a manifestation of popular will, not as a personal manifestation of truth. Moreover, the emphasis is clearly laid on the public power of communication rather than on the private activity of thought, so that at once a socially purposive atmosphere is created, and it is only a step from this to the propaganda-insistence of the Communist literary code. It is natural for democratic theory to impose practical ends on thought, because the doctrine on which it insists, the right to vote, the right to fair trial, the right to hold property, is defined entirely from the point of view of popularly available advantages : if thought is to be included in the democratic state, as it must be for the democratic claim of transcendental comprehensiveness, it must be endowed with easy criteria of success. The result is a more effective outlawry of poetry than that achieved by the benevolent neglect of the old-fashioned state.

But the Communist view of literature is far more destructive of authorial integrity than the democratic view. It does not merely diffuse the essence of the literary consciousness and make every book by an *author* a commercial uncertainty (a ' difficult ' book) ; it systematically denies the existence of any consciousness but the physical, offering a devil's bargain to the poet—psychological adjustment to the physical world, fame and audiences guaranteed—in return for his assistance in the re-physicalization of human life. The object of Communism is to reintroduce into consciousness all the physical impediments of which it has for centuries been gradually purifying itself.

The leader of the French Communist party declared on 15th July 1936 :

Naturally we are Communists, but we are not trying to change the regime. All we want is a little more well-being for the working class within the present regime. Naturally we hope that the establishment of the Communist system will take place in France, but whatever form it takes will be essentially French and not a thing dictated from outside. Moreover, at the moment we are members of the Popular Front. This has brought us benefit, and we shall know how to discharge our responsibilities. We are enemies of property in this sense : we are enemies of the capitalist property of the great trusts, but we do not think that merchants and manufacturers on a small scale ought to be persecuted. We are in agreement with the Socialists and Radicals in whatever does anything to help them and sustain their existence. They ought to be protected and given greater credit facilities to lighten their needy conditions and the difficulties they suffer in the face of high costs, and in consideration of their lack of sufficient capital.

The aim of Communism is here disarmingly stated to be the attainment of just a little more of commonplace well-being. It is interesting to find a Communist leader himself declaring that his party, which has been acclaimed as a means of a new civilization, is concerned with the extension of the nineteenth-century ideal of physical comfort. Communism is revealed as a movement to make the workers bourgeois, devoted to material respectability and to little else. Capitalism is to be indulged ; though no single person is to have too much, the possession of capital is still to be facilitated. Nationalism is not to be discountenanced ; it is to remain the same expansive localism as always. When Communism is so obligingly stripped of its modernistic formidableness, it is easily recognizable as no more sublime than any other recipe for physical prosperity—and yet it offers itself as the intellectual superior of democracy.

The democratic view of the literary consciousness is a sentimental error against which it is not impossible for the

poet to hold his own : the democrat firmly believes himself the poet's friend. But Communism makes no provision for the poet, shrewdly designing his suppression. The poet who has to put up with democratic publishing methods may still find dignity in the thought that he is not conspiring against himself, but merely standing for the moment as a member of a preposterously large literary fellowship, doomed to repeated self-reduction ; the vanity of others is no outrage to one's own dignity. The poet who gives himself to Communism conspires in his own suppression. He consoles himself with the thought that the physical resurrection which is the ideal of Communism may eventually bring about the rebirth of poetry ; yet he knows that poetry is not what will be, but what is. He is a tired man, suffering from all uncharitableness ; but if he lies down on the bed of Communism he may never get up again.

Fascism, though like Communism attempting to arouse feelings of guilt in the poet toward his immediate social world, does not issue invitations or make any promises to him. Instead, it gives him a stern warning against distracting the public mind from that sense of triumph in physical existence which it is Fascism's object to cultivate. Fascism, that is, attempts to consolidate as adequate reality the given physical properties, where it is Communism's object to render reality in physical terms, create new physical values to fill out its despiritualized universe. In Germany the given physical properties comprise the ideal of human self-sufficiency ; in Italy, the authority for caprice of action. The Fascist poet is not invited to elevate and purify, he is merely permitted to cheer. This forbidding attitude to poetry on the Fascist side accounts for the extremely small number of poets professing Fascist sympathies and for the rush of poetry-nervous poets to the Communist ranks.

The opposite number to the Communist poet is not the Fascist, but the Catholic, or Anglo-Catholic : the poet escaping from the modern noise of factions into a pseudo-medieval quietism.

The necessity for class-consciousness ? Very well, then, let us be class-conscious—ourselves, the true working class : those who are professionally pledged to the work of truth. We, doing the primary labour by which reality becomes livable and knowable, are the abused class. The writer who turns Communist, in search of a class, transfers to a hypothetical class the outrages that he suffers for being a writer. For the intrinsic distinctions between people are those of consciousness, not of action. There are, intrinsically, only two classes of people : those who think, and those who apply thought to the temporary ends of physical life. In the latter class are to be included those who think applied thought, such as the scientists, the sociologists, the historians—and the philosophers in large degree, since the significance of their work is in large degree sociological.

Let writers, if they feel that a distressing confusion of values exists, turn to that confusion by which they must placate the world-at-large for being what they are. The enemy is not the bourgeois class, not the capitalist class, but the whole ungrateful, self-greedy historical population, in which the so-called working class is numerically predominant. How do we manage to do our work at all, with this artillery of material interests trained against us, 'our' publishers at the guns ? A miracle ? No, not exactly : because we are not a miracle, but necessitous beings, and what is necessitous somehow manages to take care of itself. And the artillery does us some good, in driving from us those who do not belong with us, who cannot face the guns ; they go over to the other side by way of the popular literary pieties, or supplicant pieties

of despair (disavowal of the validity of thought—T. S. Eliot for an example), or, finally, by way of the Communist substitution of materialist intelligence for thought—since thought has so hard a life to live. We, however, do not mind this hard life, which is the fault not of thought but of the unwitting enmity of the world-at-large; we are even sorry for the world-at-large. We do mind the desertions of those who by given quality of mind belong with us: because they are leaving a few of us to do all the work. Let them go, if it gives them pleasure (we doubt that it does). But let us hear no more of class-consciousness from them.

Confessions by writers at the Writers' Congress in Paris in the summer of 1935 supply interesting data for a psychology of intellectual desertion. Julien Benda, who had already formulated an accusation of apostasy against the 'Clerks' (the apostasy of nationalism—'The nationalist clerk is a German invention and in the world of spiritual things Germany has been completely victorious'), now spoke on the same platform with Communists, pleading for the internationalism of art. Art? Let us be clear in our terms. Art is no element of literature. Art is humility of physical consciousness; at its best it is the friend of literary consciousness in the world-at-large. Literature and internationalism? Literature is a concentration of mental forces, not a diffusion. Anti-nationalistic deconcentration does not result in literature, as internationalism does not, as nationalism does not. Literature is not produced co-operatively by the world-at-large, whether it be the world-at-large of the whole earth or of a single country. It is produced by the co-operation of a few writers within a concentrated range; terms like 'national' and 'international' are part of the fictional lumber of physical extent which crumbles into discovered illusion when

writers stand on their true ground, language. And yet there are different languages, apparent encumbrances between people dedicated to the work of thought ? Not really. People speak differently as they are located differently : there are different speeches. But there is no such thing as thinking differently ; there are not, really, different languages. The language of thought has a uniform quality, and this quality is most purely rendered in English. This is a literary, not a nationalistic statement : we regard English not as a term of national identification but as denoting the nature of the literary language. The problems which Benda headlines under the political title of 'internationalism' are no more than the strictly literary problems of *translation*. 'Translationism' is perhaps as dubious a faith as 'internationalism' ; but free at least of its fallacy of large-scale co-ordinations and experimentally practicable within its limits.

Christina Stead, in the official English Communist report of the Paris Congress, wrote, contrasting the sureness of the writer in U.S.S.R., where the Communist paradise has been attained, with the transitionalism of English writers :

The problems of most serious liberal-minded writers outside the U.S.S.R. are real. If they are not persecuted nor in exile they pant for a public. The giant circulations of the U.S.S.R. suggest a way out. But they have to switch from the macadam of bourgeois culture which is leading them obviously into a morass to a new clay road, hardly rolled. They are floundering, their feet are getting sticky, they . . . are loved neither by those they seek nor those they leave. They have at once to earn their livings, satisfy their publishers, change their minds and study politics.

Apart from the Russian writers, 'who do not face our problems', Christina Stead says,

There are two kinds of writers involved, the elder pre-War writers, balanced, witty, sensitive, who suppress in a manly

way their regret that they have to study politics and know something about unemployment and the tough, fiery, humourless young ones, who have to give up their poetic solitudes and soft self-probings to study worldly subjects, take lessons from working men and use their pen as a scalpel for lifting up the living tissues, cutting through the morbid tissues, of the social anatomy. The best of both parties seem aware that they have no future, that the true 'great writers' will come after, that they are themselves only breaking the ground.

A very honest description, this, of the grotesqueness of the writer turned, or trying to turn, humanitarian politician. But behind it the same blindness to literary proprieties which causes this grotesqueness. The writer taking lessons from working men—indeed ! And in what ? Social anatomy ? And what is working-class knowledge of social anatomy if not what writers without the patience of literature have given them ? And what is this social anatomy but a debased phraseology imposed on working people by an appeal to their literary vanity ?

The true anatomy of the universe is not scientific or social, but poetic ; the universe is structurally of thought, not of physical or sociological material. Who are these phraseological middlemen who would teach us all our jobs ? Let them choose clearly between what they call the working class, and literature. They have chosen the working class ; then let them leave literature alone, for they cannot know what it is, to construe the possibility of such a choice. Those who belong to the working class, in the sociological sense of the term, do so not as the result of intellectual choice but by native destiny. If those who natively belong to literature wish to leave it, out with them, then. But let them not cover their desertion with accusations of perfidy to the working class against those who remain loyal to literature. We are not deceived : mercy be on their poor literary consciences.

Literature is not to be packed up in the baggage of writers off to the Class War. Nor does it need political partisans against bourgeois legislation. A common 'radical' indignation is the lack of freedom which writers have to say what they please. We have complete freedom to say exactly what we please in literary, poetic contexts. The suppression of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* ? Excellent ! Sexual fanaticism is not literature. We do not want it ; the world-at-large does not want it. Who wants it ? Ex-literary politicians, to feed their sense of counter-machination ? Then there are always presses in Paris for this sort of thing. Has any of them not been able to read the book ? The suppression of *Ulysses* ? Excellent ! Obscene disintegration of the dignity of language is not literature. We do not want it ; *they* do not want it. And are not the presses of Paris sufficient to the pornographic day ? It is not bourgeois legislation that is the enemy of literature, but the world-at-large, which includes the ex-literary politicians, in assuming that the ends of literature lie outside of literature—in the region of physical or aesthetic or philosophical comfort. It is not what they forbid us to write but what they do with what we do write that constitutes the outrage against literature : they throw away what does not serve their temporary ends, leaving us to rescue truth as we can from the waste-paper basket of popular inattention.

And then the surrealists acquire a political sense of themselves : logical. For surrealism is the definition of reality as the chaotic physical impression which reality makes on the mind in a state of complete torpor ; it is the substitution of ignorance for knowledge as the state in which reality is to be faced. Surrealism advocates an artificially induced innocence as a means of self-protection against the demands of civilized conscious-



ness ; and Communism offers a social machinery by which daily life may be systematically rid of the civilized responsibilities of thought. Louis Aragon's message to the Writers' Congress of 1935 was that the movement from Dada to Surrealism to true realism, which he identified with Communism, was fore-ordained.

All this phraseological clamour of self-justification because a few thousand—or let it be many thousand—people find themselves unequal to the demands of literature. (The surrealists invent demands of art from which to escape to a simple life of art, but it is the nature of art that it makes no demands : a simplifying of the simplicity of art is a resort to imbecility.) There are people who identify themselves with literature who do not even realize or admit that there are demands in it to be escaped from. But these merely amuse or inspire vicarious shame—according to the prominence they achieve as representatives of literature. They raise no phraseological clamour ; they are modest enough, really, asking only to be allowed to pass as literary folk with the world-at-large, which does not care one way or the other. It is those who know what they do who must bear the weight of accusation : who vocalize the antagonism to literature which has been dumbly accumulating for centuries in the world-at-large. It would be false to our class-consciousness as writers to pretend indifference : we are left short-handed, with a great deal of work still to do.

*SECTION SIX*  
**THE POLITICAL PAST**



## *The Political Past*

POLITICS have always covered two distinct kinds of problems : problems of administrative routine, and problems which may be called, characteristically, 'questions' of the moment. The first kind includes such matters as views on the powers and responsibilities of public office, the creation or suppression of offices and, in general, the relations between the governed and the governing—these relations, or any other problem of administrative routine, tending to become a question of the moment whenever the emotional unanimity of the community is for some reason broken.

A question of the moment, is, in fact, a substitute for a notion, like the idea of God or hereditary monarchy or national glory, that has ceased to act as a symbol of human co-ordination. It represents no new positive certainty to replace the discredited certainty, but is what the name implies : the raising of a question that an old certainty does not seem to answer. Excited concern with questions of popular representation, peace as against war, and other matters of foreign policy, is bred of a collapse of faith ; it is the 'antis' who translate what should properly be problems of concrete routine into 'causes'. And behind such causes there is the discomfort of lost faith, temporarily soothed by a faith of negation. For example, heated advocacy of popular representation is really based on a loss of faith in the notion of government itself, which depends on belief in human capacity to govern. As a problem of concrete

routine, popular representation need involve no evangelical fierceness : the essential point is the realization that human capacity to govern is heavily qualified by a variety of limitations in circumstances and human nature. Such a realization, incorporated in the content of the notion of government, increases political intelligence. But when popular representation is made into a counter-faith to the notion of responsible government, a curious contradiction results : though responsibility is denied because found to be extremely relative, it is at the same time stated as an emotional absolute even in being denied. The same process operates when economic problems are translated into causes ; cynical analysis of the modes in which human nature has expressed itself economically for thousands of years becomes the means of elevating economic expression into an emotional absolute.

The confusion centering in the habit of political causes may be described as human self-criticism developed into an ideal of human perfectionism which is only strategically believed in. An old-fashioned Socialist verse begins : ' The people is a beast of muddy brain. . . . ' Yet, for the sake of political attack, this beast is held out as the figurehead of perfectionism. Such ideals as theocracy, hereditary monarchy, national glory, and even popular representation, have successively broken down as instrumental symbols of human co-ordination ; and now popular economics form the counter-symbol. If all co-ordinating energy were vested in any of these governmental ideals, thought, as such, would have ceased long ago and we should all be absorbed in the technical administration of daily life. Likely, indeed, human life itself would have already ceased, its true ends lost ; for the ends of life are in thought, not in living itself. Politics represent, properly, the minutiae of community co-ordination, problems of community well-being, rules

of external life by which one person within a community shall constitute the least possible physical interference to another. Assuming such a temporal condition of restricted interference to have been established—what then? The same ends remain to be fulfilled—the ends of thought, the discovery of reality, the definition of truth.

Poets are endowed with powers of annulling the physical interference that other people constitute, and even because the principle of co-ordination they observe is not a physical one. Few people are poets in total degree; we do not recommend anarchism, which is based on the sentimental fallacy that all people are exclusively poets. But most people are to some degree poets—political solutions are inevitable for no one except the rhetoricians of politics.

The origin of European politics is to be found in the perpetual intra-community disagreements that went on in every Greek city-state as to the best means of achieving physical prosperity amid the rivalry between one state and another. Since that time, though states have become larger and more complicated units, no political ambition has ever had any object other than that of physical prosperity, however idealistically phrased. The politician was then what he still fundamentally is: a servant charged with doing the routine-work of civic administration and with suggesting alterations where the provisions for public well-being appear inadequate to contemporary needs. The task was regarded as burdensome and invidious; it was not undertaken, at first, as a career, but from public-spiritedness, and by men too old to be soldiers or to work in the fields.

In ancient Greece there were three kinds of political opinion, and these were concerned merely with the formal type of government suitable to a state at any given time: democratic, oligarchic or dictatorial. The

same was true of Rome until the bureaucracy of the Empire put an end to all other forms. Politics in the ancient world meant struggles for local supremacy within the various states between rival clans. If their strength was evenly matched, there was an oligarchy ; if one became powerful enough to expel its rivals, there was a dictatorship ; if the dictatorship was too arrogant or too neglectful of the state's well-being, there was a sudden revolution, followed either by a democratic regime, another dictatorship or a return to oligarchy. There might be a rich variety of political incident to account for these changes—an unpopular war, an unpopular alliance, excessive taxes, uneven justice, an outrage of popular religious sensibilities ; but economic theory never played any major part in the politics of the Classical world. The nearest equivalent to Socialistic activity was the occasional attempt of some bankrupt aristocrat to incite the debt-ridden mob to revolt and proclaim *tabulae novae*, the writing-off of all existing debts. But even here there was no intention of supplanting one economic method with another. Indeed, so long as slavery formed a part of national economy, any weakening of the existing economic structure would have been extensively suicidal.

In the ancient world, therefore, there was no temptation to make politics a subject for humanitarian poetry. Personal invective in lampoons, particularly at Rome, comic satire, as in the plays of Aristophanes, prose speculation upon the most suitable constitution for states in general, as in Plato's *Republic*, and oratorical disquisition for oratory's sake, were politics' sufficient representation in literature. The public character always remained the public servant, concerned before everything with his rather stuffy administrative task on behalf of his often jealous and always suspicious fellow-citizens—except

when a war, or sudden national expansion, made him a symbolic figurehead of the nation's more grandiose physical ambitions. And this has continued to be so in Europe ever since.

Archons at Athens, consuls at Rome, prime ministers in modern Europe—these are not remembered after their death, as poets and even generals are remembered, unless some national emergency has given them symbolic prominence. Pericles is remembered for his control of Athenian affairs during the period when the Athenians put out their naval strength in the war against Sparta, Richelieu for making France the proudest European power of his time, Pitt for his successful conduct of affairs during the Napolconic wars, Disraeli for securing control of the Suez Canal and adding India to the British Crown. But normally politicians are rightly regarded as mere managing clerks, fulfilling the artificial role of elders to the children of the state. Citizenship confers the benefits of immaturity on the populace; state officials must play the old-man parts. No one regards them as possessing more than theatrical maturity; and political wisdom always has an accent of youthful affectation of maturity. The only apparent exceptions to the rule of political oblivion are the Cicero's and Demosthenes's, who are celebrated not for what they did or stood for as statesmen, but for the grammatical vigour of their eloquence: their utterances have been assumed to have an educative value for people who make politics their career, and for people in general, by being examples of incisive prose. But the orators never amounted to much as politicians; literary vanity prevented them from sinking their personalities in civic service.

In mediæval Europe politics were concerned chiefly with the uncomfortable dyarchy by which every state was governed: the temporal and the spiritual rule—the



temporal overlord being sometimes a willing ally and sometimes a threatening master and sometimes an unwilling slave to the spiritual overlord at Rome, or Constantinople or Avignon. The political grievance was that the country was impoverished by the double levy of taxes imposed by this system, the middlemen of each half of the dyarchy enriching themselves unjustly in the names of their superiors, the poor victimized on every side. Complaints against ecclesiastical rogueries were more vocal in England than elsewhere because of the great distance from Rome, and already in the thirteenth century a great body of Latin satirical ballads against the immorality and greed of the clerics had been circulating. These were the work of cultured writers, but some were translated into English, and others on their model, such as *The Evil Times of Edward II.*, were also current in English among the commons.

The first English political poem which has literary as opposed to merely satiric pretensions is Langland's *Piers Plowman*. The hero is the idealized honest country labourer, whose sickle crossed with the town-worker's hammer has become the Marxist emblem. But Langland was no leveller. He believed in a strong king, supported by devout bishops and noble knights and lords, all attentive to the welfare of the people—a national front against the depredations of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie consisted chiefly of parasitic clerics, but included also merchants and tradesmen whose dishonesties should be kept in check by the King and his Parliament. Langland calls for governmental control of :

Brewsters and baksters. bochers and cokes ;  
 For these aren men on this mold. that most harme worcheth  
 To the pore peple that parcel-mele buggen.

'The pore peple that parcel-mele buggen' means 'the

wage-earning retail-consumer'. *Piers Plowman* was only in verse by the accident of the times. It was a semi-mystical political tract intended to be committed to memory by the uneducated poor—verse-form used to give verbal emphasis. But for a strong sense of social injustice, probably sharpened by the fact of his bastardy, Langland would never have come to be included in the roll of English poets; *Piers Plowman* is not a poem, but something between philosophical speculation on possible remedies for the ills of the day and declamation against those who seemed immediately responsible for them.

Langland's political opinions resemble very closely those of Chaucer, but Chaucer was a poet and made a clean separation between his political opinions, which he expressed humorously, and his poetic energies. Politically, he supported John of Gaunt's party of feudalists against the growing power of the new nobility, the middle classes and the monks. In the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer's most sympathetic portraits are those of the Knight, the Squire, the Franklin (or country gentleman), the Oxford Clerk, the Poor Parson and the Ploughman; his most mocking are those of middle-class characters—the Doctor, the Man of Law, the Friar, the Miller, the Reeve, the Shipman, the Cook, the Manciple, the Pardoner and the Summoner. His *Sir Thopas*, a burlesque of the rhymed chivalric romances of the day, is at the same time a satire on the Flemish burghers of the party of Philip von Artevelde who had risen against their feudal overlords. But the 'cause' note never occurs in Chaucer.

The next poet, after Chaucer, who had strong political opinions was Skelton. His satiric *Colyn Cloute* was in verse for the same reason that *Piers Plowman* was: verse made the subject more vivid for illiterate readers. And, like *Piers Plowman*, it was very widely known. It is

written down to the popular understanding and directed against the luxury and haughtiness of the lords of the Church who are a law to themselves, respect neither the King nor the people and bring the Church into disrepute. They have now gained ascendancy as advisers to the King over the feudal nobility, and outdo them in temporal pomp :

For the lordes temporall  
 Theyr rule is very small,  
 Almost nothing at all. . . .  
 . . . Noble men borne  
 To lerne they have scorne,  
 But hunt and blowe an horne  
 Lepe over lakes and dykes,  
 Set nothing by polytykes ;  
 Therefore ye kepe them base  
 And mocke them to theyr face.

The political balance is thus upset, and the prelates, being men of lewd birth and no learning, have nothing to recommend them socially. But, like *Why Come ye Nat to Courte ?* and *The Bowge of Courte*, *Colyn Cloute* is clearly inspired less by political than by private feud. Skelton, a poet and scholar, and formerly tutor and adviser to the King, is now a parish priest under the severe discipline of a notoriously ill-living bishop, Nix of Norwich, and supplanted at court by Wolsey, the ignorant upstart of 'greasy genealogy'. These verses come no more properly within the canon of his poems than do his witty flytings against the Scots and against the rival poet Garnesh.

Henry's breach with Rome put a temporary end to all political verse in which the complaint was based on the evils of dyarchy. In the Elizabethan age, though all the poets had patrons and identified themselves with them politically, the nation was sufficiently united to make

political partisanship an incidental matter ; satire was against specific persons or against specific personal types, not classes. It was only when a Puritan Parliament re-instituted dyarchy, by forcing the King to cede it some of his powers, that satire was renewed as a political weapon, by Cleveland and the cavalier ballad-writers. During the Commonwealth much anti-Puritan verse was written, Butler's *Hudibras* the most bitter, but little or nothing published until the Restoration.

Milton was by nature a philosopher rather than a poet, and during the Commonwealth abandoned his over-cultivated early lyricism for politico-religious controversy. He only returned to poetry after the extinction of his political hopes, and then to a poetry with both lyricism and political hate disciplined out of it—in which he attempted to establish psychological equivalence between the religious and the poetic temperament. His political verse consists merely of the lines on 'The New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament', and four sonnets : eulogies of Cromwell and Fairfax, and the sonnets on the Piedmont massacre and on the reception of his tract 'Tetrachordon'.

Herrick, on the other hand, was a Royalist only for domestic reasons ; Charles had secured him the benefice of Dean Prior. He mixed political epigram with his poems and acquiesced in the notion of Divine Right, but only in so far as it sustained him in sophisticated isolation—a metaphysical rusticity. The 'Sun' is Prince Charles as a mild patron of literary ease, and the Western Garden of Hesperides the 'dull Devonshire' of his rural seclusion.

After the Restoration, when the fear of another civil war held the two opposing parties in the state at arm's length, professional political verse began—the satiric discrediting of the opposing party with the object of

keeping them out of power. Sir John Denham, in his *Instructions to a Painter*, was the first of the anti-Court satirists, and Marvell succeeded him. Marvell's satires were journalistic exposures and had great contemporary influence in consolidating what was later to be called the Whig party. They have no connexion with his poems proper. The century that followed was the most active politically and the most barren poetically in modern English history. The field of political verse was divided between Dryden, Pope and their successors, who combined literary professionalism with politics, and obscure lampoonists who specialized in vituperative ballads-to-the-tune-of, *Last Wills*, *Advices*, rhymed chronicles and the like. The two parties, Whig and Tory, ceased to represent any disagreement between rival governmental principles, and political verse therefore became purely factious and personal. But it was next to impossible for a poet to get a hearing without declaring for one party or the other and engaging in political journalism. The writers with most capacity, Defoe and Swift and 'Peter Pindar', elected to become professional pamphleteers; none of them was above dicking with the opposing party and all squandered their energies in satire or prose narrative of sociological cast. The official poets stood for formalism in technique, 'moralized verse' (as Pope put it) and urbane pastoralism.

It was a political change that broke the spell: the French Revolution provided a third party—the Jacobins. Jacobinism introduced a naturalistic idealism into politics. And it was not surprising that in England the poets who felt themselves to be poets, in contrast with the intelligent nonentities who gained chaplaincies and sinecures by party influence under the patronage-system, should respond sympathetically to a doctrine of anti-privilege. To Blake, a lower middle-class mystic, to

Wordsworth and Southey, ebullient University undergraduates, to Shelley and Coleridge, eccentric young intellectuals, the doctrine of liberty, equality, fraternity was an invitation to free adventures in life and poetry. Blake wore a red cap in the streets of London, Coleridge and Wordsworth came under suspicion of the anti-revolutionary police ; Shelley sealed his letters with a revolutionary wafer, distributed political tracts in Ireland, wrote poems inciting the agricultural labourer to strike. The notion of 'good' literature as the ally of revolutionary politics came into vogue. But Blake found himself forced to change over from revolutionary politics to revolutionary theology in order to survive as a poet ; and the test of whether he succeeded in surviving or not must rest on the poetic value of his mystical poems, which form the bulk of his work. Wordsworth and Southey covered their Jacobin tracks by turning themselves into respectable literary men ; Shelley became a martyr to his faith in the perfectability of all humanity by means of poetic prayer ; Coleridge alone managed to escape from politics unscathed in soul, though too obsessed with a sense of lost time to recover his poetic health.

By the time of the Reform Bill and the Abolition of Slavery, all idealistic political activity on the part of the poets had ceased, as well as the vigorous satire of the *Anti-Jacobin* and its successors. It is noteworthy that the great Chartist Movement of the '30's and '40's, which failed in its day but practically every demand of which came to be fulfilled by the end of the century, had no ambitious young University poets supporting it. They were all busy with cultural humanitarianism, omitting the preliminary political stage, or with aestheticism, or with both. Literary geniality was the aim equally of the generation of Tennyson and of the Pre-Raphaelites. William Morris, the most gifted of either group, did not become

an active Socialist until late middle age. The nearest that Tennyson came to belonging to a political party was the black cape and sombrero that he bought as a young man, to show his sympathy with the Carlist cause in Spain.

The Romantic poets had welcomed Jacobinism as a physical revolution which would give them, along with every one else, more freedom for the functioning of the non-physical faculties. They used Jacobinism as a poetic, not intrinsically political, theme—the vista of universal spiritualization. Thus Shelley, in the *Ode to Naples* :

Didst thou not start to hear Spain's thrilling pæan  
 From land to land re-echoed solemnly,  
 Till silence became music? From the Ægean  
     To the cold Alps, eternal Italy  
     Starts to hear thine! The Sea  
 Which paves the desert streets of Venice laughs  
     In light and music; widowed Genoa wails  
 By moonlight spells ancestral epitaphs,  
     Murmuring, 'Where is Doria?' fair Milan,  
     Within whose veins long ran  
 The viper's paralysing venom, lifts her heel  
 To bruise his head. The signal and the seal  
     (If Hope and Truth and Justice can avail)  
 Art thou of all these hopes.—O hail!

Very different is the approach of contemporary poets to Communism. They begin with soul-probings about the Relation of the Individual to Society, pass through a phase of schoolmasterly exhortation to maintain the team-spirit, linger pathologically upon 'the palpable and obvious love of man for man', and end with rhapsodies on industrialism—not on Hope and Truth. As in C. Day Lewis :

Others, too, will die hard,  
 Spenders of life, they dealt freely with danger;  
 These could not learn to hoard

To count the cost or to examine the change.

A hungry soul

Urged them to try new air-routes, and their skill

Raftered the sky with steel :

They took the field with laughter, they attacked the  
bowling.

In the machines' heart regularly breathing

We hear their hearts still beat,

Inherit their strength and swiftness through the turbine :

Pausing between the shifts or in the pub at evening

We feel their generous heat ;

We remember them as the glowing fruit remembers

Sapflow and sunshine.

To the Romantic poet political Jacobinism was a step that the populace might take toward the exaltation which he possessed himself by what he thought to be the natural Jacobinism of poetry. The Communist poet cannot pretend that poetry is naturally Communist without assuming what he takes to be the bar-parlour attitude of the worker and lecturing his literary fellows on the parasitism of the poetic function as such.

The attraction for poets of the political cause is to be explained by the involuntary conviction that poets have that they are *good*—because they are poets. The goodness of poetry, however, does not need to be proved in pious partisanship of political causes. It is best demonstrable in poems written as poems—not as political, philosophical, aesthetic or musical displays. But poets are sensitive to the challenge 'What is the moral justification of poetry?' Hence the ease with which causes bully them into partisanship—by making their sense of goodness wince at the notion of all the injustices prevalent in the world of physical life.

The central question, in this matter of the practical effectiveness of poetry and poets, is on the subject of



generalization and specialization. Assuming that a poet has an end of doing good : what kind of good ? But the poets are specialists only in the sense that they must specialize in the *general* work of clarifying the values of the good—in which no other class of persons specializes (is pledged to specialize) so indefatigably and uncompromisingly. This is not merely a specialization in the values of good behaviour, or of good economics, or of good social efficiency. It is the definition of a notion of good that shall be uniform for every department of existence : real, literal moral consistency is poetic consistency. The quality of a poet's concern with the good must be such that it includes good economics in the universal pattern of good ends in its proper and exact status of importance. But a specialistic concern in the poet with good economics or any other particular concept of good means just that much neglect of the whole problem of moral consistency—just that much unpracticalness as a poet. Poets must indeed be practical ; to attempt to be a practical politician, however, is to be the less practical as a poet, and to look for a practicalness of poetry in politics that they cannot possibly yield.

The 'ordinary' person has an intuitive if vague understanding of these elementary distinctions—has what might be called a true class sense. When poets and writers lose vocational sense of themselves, their views on poetry and literature become far more vulgar than those of the democratic masses.



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MORRISON AND GIBB LTD., LONDON AND EDINBURGH





